

AMONG THE RUINS

GOMEZ CARRILLO

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AMONG THE RUINS

THE GREAT WAR

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WILLIAM HEINEMANN

21 BEDFORD STREET, LONDON, W C.

AMONG THE RUINS

BY
GOMEZ CARRILLO

TRANSLATED BY
FLORENCE SIMMONDS



LONDON
WILLIAM HEINEMANN

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

SEÑOR GOMEZ CARRILLO, a favoured Spanish war correspondent, was among the first to visit those beautiful parts of France recovered from the Germans since the Battle of the Marne. He describes with convincing fidelity what he saw "Among the Ruins," and his volume will be read with interest by all who care to know what the traces were like which the German hordes who invaded France left behind them, and how their infamies inspired our allies to almost superhuman efforts.

FROM PARIS TO ESTERNAY

November 15, 1914.

OUR visions of war begin at the very gates of Paris, before the glacis of the fortifications. These regions, but a few months ago studded with boisterous little cheap restaurants sacred to popular romance, are now converted into entrenched camps. The *gabelou* * who only looked into the baskets of those who were entering the city, has been replaced by a severe sentinel, who carefully examines the baskets of those who are leaving it. On every hand the great chestnuts, razed to the level of the ground, check the progress of carriages. Lines of barbed wire entangled among the leafless branches form a fantastic vegetation of grey spines. At every strategic point, parapets of wood and iron offer shelter to sharpshooters, and here and there some huge apparatus of steel bristling with spear-heads presents an impenetrable front to possible cavalry attack. All this is now but a memory of those dark days when the German cavalry seemed to be rushing down upon Paris like an avalanche.

* A slang term for an exciseman.

The officer who is to accompany us in our excursion to the battle-fields contemplates the Parisian defences with a smile in which I detect a touch of irony, and even, perhaps, of regret. How glorious a struggle on this legendary spot, under these sacred walls, would have been ! According to some military writers, General Joffre proposed to make Paris the tomb of William II's army. His modern military spirit would not have shrunk from purchasing victory at the price of sacrifices, the very thought of which filled us worshippers of the city with horror.

If it should be necessary to fight on the Boulevards, said a Minister at the end of August, on the Boulevards we will fight !

Happily Saint Geneviève was there on her ancient terrace, as we see her in Puvis de Chavannes' fresco, to repeat the miracle that turned back the hosts of Attila. As of old, the barbarians of to-day fled from the outskirts of Lutetia before they had even caught sight of her church-towers. Certain strategists profess themselves unable to explain the military reasons for the German tactics of September 5, 1914. They do not know the secrets of the saints who watch over the city in their stone niches. . . . The soldier who is our guide, a charming cavalry

captain, who seems to have stepped out of one of Raffet's prints, describes with sober eloquence the operations which determined the defeat of the first German army on the third day of the Battle of the Marne.

"In a few hours," he says, "we shall arrive at the plain near Provins, where the advance of von Bülow and von Kluck was checked."

The military motor-car which is taking us to the theatre of yesterday's tragedy, and will afterwards take us to that of to-day's, glides along the admirable road, driven by an artilleryman. The quiet plains of the Île-de-France stretch away on either side in gentle undulations. Nothing in the picture before our eyes speaks of violence, cruelty, and death. Everything indeed under the autumn sky and among the golden foliage breathes the sweetness of life. Sometimes we might almost be in a park, so richly has the humble hand of toil adorned the landscape. The trees are grouped into harmonious bouquets. The most modest walls are wreathed with ivy. Before the poorest hovels the last flowers of the year open their corollas with a melancholy grace.

It was the season of sowing, and we were struck by the absence from the scene of the robust sower, the figure which in the old

allegories seems to typify the energy of the fertile earth. Only old men and women now guide the plough ; all who can carry a gun are fighting in the distant trenches.

In the villages, too, the streets are empty, and only wrinkled or feminine faces look out from the windows to see us pass.

“Wait until we come to the districts which were occupied by the Germans,” says our guide, and looking at his watch, he adds: “We shall very soon be there.”

We speed through several villages without stopping. In each a tiny church uplifts its old stone belfry in the darkening space. The farms, with their grey walls and heavy square towers, look like castles. Infinite calm, absolute quietude breathe from the humble cottages. Forgetting what we have read as to the recent sufferings of the whole region, we feel the sweet tranquillity of French village life stealing over us. How far we are from Paris—and how far, how very far from war !

But suddenly the car pulls up.

“Now,” says our captain, “we are going to walk a bit. Here about Esternay, we shall have a great deal to see.”

And, indeed, hardly have we taken a few steps

when we are surprised by the most melancholy sight. One after another, ruined dwellings make their appearance. At first we see only dismantled walls, heaps of rubbish, burnt roofs. The general view is lamentable. But the details are even more so. Through the huge cracks in the façades the drama of each rustic home presents itself with sinister distinctness. Furniture and personal belongings, kitchen utensils, agricultural implements, all the treasures of the house are heaped together in fantastic confusion. We see that the invasion surprised these unhappy people as the lava-torrent of Vesuvius surprised the inhabitants of Pompeii. On one kitchen stove a saucepan full of stale bread shows that at the tragic moment the peasant was preparing his soup. A little farther, near a charred wooden stool, a doll lies with outstretched arms. An old cloak still hangs from a nail, spared by the fire that has consumed the dwelling. The caprice of the flames is more evident here than in those vast Canadian forests, where a few pines always remain intact after a forest fire. Sometimes the most fragile thing in some poor home is the one that has survived: a picture on the wall, a branch of palm over a bed, a flower on the chimney-piece.

Where are the people now who were cultivating these fields yesterday? Where is the man of the cloak? the little girl of the doll? . . .

At a street-corner, before the ashes of a farm, we meet the only beings who are still living, phantomlike, among the ruins. They are two little old women with livid faces, gazing in silence at what no longer exists.

"The others," says one of them, "have disappeared. Some are dead . . . the rest . . . God knows where they are. . . ."

Then she goes on to tell us in long drawn sentences of her companion, the other old woman, who was rich, had six cows, a fine new house, a well-stocked poultry-yard, and a young son. . . .

"The day the Germans arrived," she murmured, they occupied everything. . . . They did nothing to me . . . they only drove me out of my house . . . but she . . . she had hidden in the cellar with her boy; they dragged her out brutally and tied her to an apple-tree. They said she was rich, that she must show them the place where she had hidden her money. . . . The poor thing had spent it all building her new house. . . . At last they unbound her, then they tied her son up and shot him. . . . He was eighteen, he might have served as a soldier. . . .

He was left there dead, his head hanging over on his breast, against that tree. . . . The Germans laughed to see him transformed into a scarecrow. . . . I asked them to let us bury him, but they would not. . . . For two days we saw him thus, until the moment when we began to hear the cannon in the direction of Esternay. . . . Then the Germans came out of our houses. . . . It was along this road that the first fled. . . . A shell burst in this yard. . . . In the evening some cyclists arrived in haste, and took from a cart several cans of petroleum with which they began to set everything on fire. . . .”

While the little old woman was talking the other stood motionless, as if the story had nothing to do with her misfortunes. Not a muscle of her face moved. Her eyes were dry, and on her lips was something that I can only liken to a dead smile.

“She has not regained her power of speech since then,” added her companion.

We, too, were incapable of speech. There were seven of us, and all of us in our way through the world had seen great tragedies and great griefs; we had all heard cries of rage and cries of agony; we are all professionally steeled against painful impressions. . . . Yet, in the

presence of this humble grief we felt an anguish that made our eyelids quiver.

The captain who was conducting our caravan was the first to master his emotion, and he reminded us that the evening was far advanced.

“We must go,” he cried.

Silently we came back to the place where we were to spend the night, without having seen the battle-field of the Marne from the heights which dominate one of the most important strategic points. The image of the desolate village haunted us. The damp landscape intersected with marshes which the twilight rays tinged with red, suggested blood. From time to time we saw on the crest of some hill the towers of a castle. Shadows began to steal over the woods of ancient oaks.

“It is cold,” said one of our companions, wrapping himself in his goatskin coat.

We all felt the cold, cold in our bodies, a deeper cold in our souls.

THE GERMANS AT MONTMIRAIL

November 17.

NESTLING cosily in its veil of ivy, Montmirail does not seem to retain a very bitter recollection of the five days the Prussians spent within its walls. Nothing here recalls the horrors of the innumerable neighbouring villages where the traces of fire and pillage are visible. Passing along the streets in every direction we see neither broken windows nor sorrowful faces. The people go about quietly, as if nothing had ever interrupted the busy monotony of their lives. Customers are drinking their *apéritifs* lazily in the cafés, and the shops are full of purchasers.

“Is it market day?” I ask a seller of post-cards.

He looks at me without taking in the meaning of my question.

“It is just a day like any other day,” he says at last.

In my ignorance of provincial mysteries I did not know that Montmirail, despite its small population, is a veritable town. This is evident from the shop windows full of elegant objects. And

then there are the new streets, which are reductions of those of Paris. But the great speciality which no one should forget, and which makes the citizens of Sézanne and La Ferté Champenoise pale with envy, is the possession of three railway stations. For Montmirail has three railway stations, just as Rome has seven hills.

“At which of the stations did you arrive?” This is the first question you are asked here.

Vain and gentle little town, which seems to have been created to preserve nothing of tragedies but a picturesque remembrance and a reflection of glory.

Here, close by, a granite column, crowned by an eagle which was once golden, bears this inscription: “Montmirail, February 11, 1814.” And History, when she recounts the last stages of the Napoleonic legend, never forgets the illustrious name of the place: “Champaubert, Nesles, Château-Thierry, Vauchamps, Montmirail.” And this though every one knows that a century ago the inhabitants of Montmirail never saw a single Cossack lance nor a single Prussian helmet. The battle was fought at a comparative distance, on the western plain, beneath the poplars wreathed with mistletoe.

In September of this ill-omened year the field

of action was more extensive. The Germans occupied the plains towards the north and the French the southern villages. For several days a hail of fire passed over the town without touching it. Full of terror, the inhabitants gazed at the flight of shells which fell and burst a hundred feet off to left and right. Trembling, they waited for the catastrophe to draw nearer and overwhelm them. But no doubt there is a god who watches over towns that possess three stations, and Montmirail was saved from bombardment.

It was saved, too, from pillage and arson. The army corps which occupied it for four days forbore, by some unexpected caprice, from shooting or robbing the population, and only outraged one woman.

“The Mayor will tell us what he knows,” said the captain of our little band of journalists.

Before we interviewed the Mayor the host of the old inn where we lunched related his personal adventures, half smiling, half indignant. The Germans entered his inn on the evening of the 5th. They were all officers. But apparently none of them belonged to the haughty Junker caste of Berlin, for, laying aside their swords, they went straight to the kitchen, to prepare a magnificent feast with their own aristocratic hands.

Well-informed as to the products of the district, they asked for fresh pork, fowls, potatoes, carrots, and butter. When the table was laid, one of them went down to the cellar and brought up two baskets of carefully chosen bottles.

“My old Chambertin,” murmured the inn-keeper sadly, “they drank it all. . . . Then they asked me for twenty bottles of champagne, and as there were only ten or twelve of them, I brought up six. Then the youngest, speaking in perfect French, told me that to punish me for my niggardliness, he should now demand thirty bottles. I told them to go and help themselves, and they needed no pressing. Each of them took two or three bottles. Of course, in an hour or so, they were all perfectly drunk. Some were singing, some laughing, others were asleep on the table. Presently a horseman arrived with a letter for the one who seemed to be in command. He read it and then called me to show them their bedrooms. When we came to mine, in which were all my possessions, they asked who slept there, and when I said that I did, they told me not to be afraid, that they would not take it from me. As they retired the young man who spoke French called out :

“We will pay you in good German gold.”

The host smiled as he recalled the scene, adding in conclusion :

“Of course, they paid me nothing, either for this first night or for the other days they spent devouring my good food.”

And it was good food indeed. As in all the old inns of this wonderful country, which has made gluttony an exquisite virtue, the food is good and the drinks even better at the Montmirail hostelry. Goethe, during his campaign in France, complained that his stomach, accustomed to the heavy sausages of Erfurt, could not digest the dishes of Champagne. The Germans of to-day, more refined in this respect at least, do honour to the enemy's cookery with an appetite that depresses the cooks. In the invaded territory we are now exploring, there is no well-stocked house which does not bear witness to German gluttony. Before setting to work to loot and ravish, shoot and burn, his Imperial Majesty's officers light the kitchen fires and visit the cellars. And what appetites these lusty warriors have !

“If it did not make one so angry,” said our host, “it would be a pleasure to see how they gorge.”

Germanophobes though we are, we all imitate

them in this respect. The cellars of the inn still contain excellent wine, and pigs and chickens still abound in the market of the town. A Scandinavian colleague on my right eats like two Uhlans. Forgetful for a moment of the pictures of desolation we have seen on the way, we appreciate the comfort of the warm room, the generous Burgundy, the succulent food. To salve our consciences, we talk of the smiling aspect of the town, the well-being of the inhabitants, the wealth of the district. Sarti, the correspondent of the Roman *Tribuna*, proposes to treat us to a glass or two of champagne.

“No,” says the captain; “champagne is forbidden until we have won a decisive victory.”

Burgundy, on the other hand, is allowed, as are also coffee and liqueurs.

“And no doubt our readers are imagining us in the trenches, dying of cold and hunger!” murmurs the editor of the *Journal de Genève*.

“There is a time for everything,” replies our guide.

Hereupon the Mayor arrives. He is an old man with a snow-white moustache, dressed in mourning, very courteous and very cold. He greets us with a bow, and disregarding the chair we offer him, he begins to speak, weighing his words as if he were attending an important meet-

ing of his municipal council. We are to him, he explains, the incarnation of universal opinion. . . . We are History. . . . We are the supreme tribunal of the nations. . . .

“For my part,” he begins, “I cannot complain of our enemies on the same grounds as many of my colleagues. The conduct of the Germans at Montmirail was decent enough, compared with their behaviour in several neighbouring towns. What was the reason of this? Some think it was due in part to my personal attitude, to the fact that I had not abandoned my post. But I think we must also take into account the fact that there was a distinguished general here, some say von Kluck, others von Bülow. I cannot say which, though I saw him several times. . . . What I do remember is that he was a man about sixty, with a pleasant face and a white moustache. . . . The day the troops entered the town this general came to the Mairie and assured me that the lives and goods of the inhabitants would be respected, on condition that the population refrained from attacking his troops. How could we have attacked them when all our able-bodied men are with the army? He recognized the force of this argument and reassured me very courteously, repeating that we had nothing to fear. We then spoke of provisions.

He required ten thousand rations of bread a day. In normal times we have many important bakeries here; but at the moment only two were working. "It doesn't matter, you must carry out my orders," he replied. And starting to walk, he desired me to show him the flour stores and the mills of the neighbourhood. When we saw that there was no lack of corn, I promised him that I would beg the well-disposed among the inhabitants to make bread. On the following day the ten thousand rations were ready. The general and his staff took up their quarters at the Château de La Rochefoucauld, at the exit of the town. The troops were billeted in private houses and public buildings. It would be untrue to say that they did not abuse the hospitality of their hosts. There is scarcely a house which was not bereft of some object carried off as a souvenir by these gentlemen. But as to tragic occurrences I may say that we had only one to complain of."

The Mayor paused for a moment, doubtful as to whether he should describe the incident or not.

"It is a delicate matter," he murmured.

We all insisted, and the captain induced him to satisfy our curiosity by assuring him that if the story was one which ought not to be published we would keep it secret.

“It has been said,” continued the Mayor, at last, “and I myself read this in *Le Temps*, that at Montmirail a German violated a little girl in the presence of her parents and had the whole family shot afterwards. This is not true. On September 7, about 10 o’clock in the evening, some of the inhabitants came in haste to fetch me. I had heard shots, and I was just about to go out and see what had happened. Some people I met pointed out a house in which two officers were quartered. When I entered, a horrible scene met my eyes. One of the officers was in his night-shirt, and quite drunk; the other was standing beside him, dressed in his uniform, and holding a revolver in his hand. On the ground, in a pool of blood, lay the two women of the house, a mother and daughter. What had happened here? The Germans, who could not speak French, could not explain; but we all reconstructed the drama in the only logical manner, taking into account the character of the victims, very honourable and worthy people. The drunken man had, no doubt, attempted to outrage the younger woman, and her mother had come to her help. At the noise of the dispute the second officer had intervened in the German fashion, which is neither gentle nor delicate. Of course, I went at once to the castle to inform the general

of the crime, and he promised that the guilty person should be brought to account. As a fact, the murderers remained quietly in the house of their victims until the whole 10th Army Corps beat a hasty retreat, leaving their wounded behind them, and carrying off our vehicles, filled with stolen goods."

The Mayor, still cold and precise, added :

"And that is all, gentlemen."

He bowed and took his leave, advising us to pay a visit to the Château de La Rochefoucauld.

Rising proudly upon the highest part of the promontory of Montmirail, the ancient seignorial dwelling dominates the dreary plain. Not a village, not a farm, not even one of those lonely hermitages so frequent in the district, is visible in the wide expanse over which the eye travels from the vantage ground. Montmirail is, as it were, lost in a desert, among the reedy marshlands and the strips of arid soil which the people of Champagne call *pouilleux*. The landscape, nevertheless, is not devoid of charm or of grandeur. The plains undulate in harmonious lines, and merge into the blue distance an immense way off. Our captain, always obsessed by ideas of strategy, points out with what science Louvois chose this site in order to command the military

roads from the high terrace where we stand. I, for my part, prefer to gaze at the walls, fissured, not by shells, but by time, and the moss-grown towers that rise into space, still eloquent of the great centuries of France. We go up to the first floor by a magnificent staircase without meeting anyone. The rooms, which might lodge a king and all his court, are abandoned. In the interminable corridors, hung with crimson damask, there is not a piece of furniture, not a suit of armour. Our footsteps echo in the void, evoking the shadows of those who once filled this "Alcazar" with song and laughter. In an angle of the first floor there is a hole in the wall, made by a French shell.

"It was that shell which put von Bülow to flight," says our guide.

Through the gap we see the plain in all its melancholy extent.

"It was down there that they fled," he adds.

And following the gesture of his arm we seem to see the hurried march of the hordes, which after dreaming, drunk with pride, of the conquest of Paris, had to beat a retreat in disorder, leaving in these tragic plains the newly dug graves of their best soldiers, lighted by the glare of burning villages.

THE RECOLLECTIONS OF A LITTLE TOWN

November 20

THIS village, so un-village like in normal times, with its little slate-roofed houses and its suburban-looking gardens, seems to have been transformed as if by some miracle. It is evident that something has happened in the selfish soul of its rich, happy, and presumptuous population ; that something has roused it from its perpetual siesta of modest well-being ; that something has made it realize that there is more in life than petty trading and small municipal passions. In its principal street the inhabitants no longer move about with a slightly grotesque gravity, and its open spaces have lost the dull tranquillity which repelled us when in holiday time we used to come, not to seek traces of invading Germans, but to admire the landscapes popularized by Servin and Granier on the banks of the Grand Morin. Oh ! that Grand Morin ! . . . I remember how, when I saw it for the first time, I wondered what the Petit Morin must be like. . . . For indeed the famous river that waters the district and enriches and

embellishes it is hardly more than a brook. One of our companions, a long-legged Yankee, declared that he could jump across it.

William II's troops were not of his opinion, it seems, for when they were checked by the bridge the French artillery had blown up, they had to spend some time looking for another bridge, in default of the classic ford.

It was down there, at Madame X—'s villa, say those nearest to us.

All the inhabitants are ranged around us, full of curiosity. All are talking to us. All want to know what we have come to do. All look respectfully at the light uniform of the captain who has us in charge. Ten or twelve compete for the honour of answering us each time we ask the most trivial question of any one of them. The whole population seems eager to give its impressions of the tragedy. Even the children escape from the doors of the shops and come smiling to find out what we are doing and seeing.

We make our way to the property through which the invaders passed on their advance towards Paris. A white-haired lady, dressed like an eighteenth-century portrait, receives us with dignified curtsies. At the end of her garden a rustic bridge connects the two banks of the river.

It was over that, she tells us.

Then she recalls what she remembers. The day the Germans occupied the place, a general presented himself at her door, and very courteously asked permission for his soldiers to cross the bridge. What could the good lady do but bow to the will of the conqueror ?

"I leave my house to you," she said, preparing to come out of it.

But the general begged her not to put herself out, assuring her that all they wanted was to cross the bridge.

"I myself will superintend the crossing," he declared.

He then ordered two chairs to be set under an apple-tree, and offered one to the lady.

The troops began to defile, stiff and martial. For hours and hours, regiments marched through the village.

"Look at them, what admirable fellows they are," murmured the chief. "They have been fighting for days together, and they look as if they were going to a review. Not one complains of fatigue. . . . The French. . . ."

The lady remarked with great dignity that her son was a French officer.

"They are brave officers, the French," said

the general. "Brave, elegant, capable of the most daring deeds. . . . But modern warfare is not what they think it. . . . All France is under the delusion that we are still in the times of Napoleon. . . . What is needed now is a virile, orderly, and disciplined people. We Germans are such a people. . . . In France, riches and prosperity have destroyed the national virtues. The women refuse to bear children, and the men prefer amusement to self-sacrifice. It is a degenerate country. When we annex it to our Empire we will restore its ancient strength by crossing its race with ours. If they understood their own interests the French would hail our victory as a saving event. If they had been left to go on as they were doing, they would have fallen into complete decadence in consequence of their party divisions, their lack of moral sense, and their hatred of religion."

"I believe," cried the old lady.

"Yes," replied the German, "women of a certain age still retain their religious faith. It is the new generations which are corrupt. Paris acts like a gangrene upon the nation. In a week's time, when we shall enter Paris, we shall at once set about purifying it and re-establishing social order. Our Emperor has a sacred mission

to fulfil : it is for him to save this distracted and effeminate race. . . . Political and religious strife has made France weak. . . .”

When the last troops had defiled, the general rose, and, still courteous, took leave of the owner of the precious bridge, promising to send her a souvenir from Paris.

The next day the Battle of the Marne began, and for four days the little town listened to the roar of cannon. The Germans entrenched in the neighbourhood tried in vain to advance towards the south, in the direction of Paris. Every hour processions of wounded men passed along the streets. The ammunition wagons at the farms were emptied with incredible rapidity. officers on horseback passed to and fro in every direction. The people complained of the robberies and brutality of the soldiers quartered in the houses.

“It was terrible,” said the good lady.

“And then ? ” we asked.

“One evening about this time the same general presented himself at my door again. He was barely recognizable. Very roughly, and without any greeting to me, he ordered the iron gate of the garden to be thrown open. . . . Four sentries were stationed on the stairs, and compelled us to

take refuge on the first floor. At the farther end of the bridge a battery was placed. The troops, formerly so martial, began to cross the river and to evacuate the village with very unheroic haste. The officers uttered cries, urging the men on, and when one of them seemed incapable of going faster they beat him with the flat of their swords. The general, standing on the same spot where we had conversed before, was scouring the neighbouring plains through his field-glasses. In three hours all that remained of the enemy's army was on the other side of the Grand Morin. The last to leave was the general, accompanied by his aides-de-camp and his four sentries."

The lady smiled, cast down her eyes, and ended thus :

"I longed to ask him if he had forgotten to bring the souvenir from Paris he had promised me."

ROUND ABOUT THE BATTLE OF MEAUX

November 22.

ON learning that it was here, at Meaux, that the Germans came nearest to realizing their dream of taking possession of Paris, I have to make a geographical effort not to contradict my guide. True, before a map, one sees that the capital of France is only forty kilometres off, which, in our giddy days, means about half an hour in a motor-car. But who thinks of maps before these aged walls and in this venerable provincial atmosphere? Giving ourselves up to our impressions, we really felt much farther from the Boulevards than when we were at Bordeaux.

The cathedral shows its time-worn front in a silent square; the most ancient mills of France rest their grey walls on a mediæval bridge; there is something about the market which recalls the old-world *halles* of Flanders; the Promenade des Trinitaires is like a cloister-garden; the narrow streets are peopled with dreams and shadows. . . .

And if the setting is old and remote, the life

that is lived in it is still more so. Take a seat at the door of any café, on any day, and you will feel as if you were looking at an old engraving. The citizens walk sedately to the various local fairs, while their wives and daughters make their way to church at the summons of the bells. There are no open doors, no flower-decked windows, no frivolous casements. Gravely and sedately the little town lives its little life without emotions and without temptations. The railway that passes through its station only stops to take in sacks of corn. The inhabitants as a rule prefer to use their traditional spring-carts to go to Château-Thierry, Lagny, La Ferté-Gaucher, or Coulommiers. As to Paris, *it is a journey*, as I have just been told by a miller who has not been to the capital since the Exhibition. On Saturdays the buyers go to the market to do business. Each carries a bag full of silver coins, and pays cash ; the wine-shops are full of sturdy villagers who drink to seal their verbal contracts ; the open spaces are blocked by horses ; the young girls appear on the balconies to look at the young men of the neighbourhood ; the aristocratic element repairs to the cathedral and kneels before the tomb of Bossuet. Wine causes songs to float upon the evening air, and at eight o'clock,

when night falls, everything relapses into its gentle age-long calm.

Even the Germans could hardly wake the town from its dream with the thunder of their cannon. A dozen Uhlans arrived on September 3 in the cathedral square without having met a soul. Where were Monseigneur Marbeau's 20,000 parishioners? No doubt the majority of them had taken flight southward in their spring-carts. But the rest? After a long search, the Prussian captain found an open boot-shop, bought a pair of boots, asked if the bridge was intact, and then went off followed by his men. The next day the battle began in the outskirts.

A friend who had been here two months ago, and who was now accompanying me in my excursion among the grave-strewn fields, led me along the cold and misty highway, towards the ravaged villages.

"If you could have seen all this after the battle!" he exclaimed. "I was obliged to leave my motor near Crégy, because the road was blocked with corpses. . . . I could never have imagined such a sight. It was horrible to see the poor soldiers, in impossible attitudes, their lifeless bodies still convulsed by the last contortions of their death-agony. I had to stride across

them. . . . Look over there, at that spot beneath the tree. There was a German there with his mouth open, showing his teeth as if to bite me, with a look of rage and hate that struck terror to the soul. . . . Others, on the contrary, seemed to have died with pardon in their hearts, so gentle and peaceful were their features. . . . And the wounds! Holy Mother! . . . There are shells which seem to mutilate men with an elaboration worthy of Mirbeau's Chinese torturers."

My friend ceased and gazed silently at the plains around us. Meaux with its towers lay below us, tranquil as ever. Of all the shells which burst hereabouts, only two or three struck it. Her cathedral and her mills are intact. This is because of the protection of St. Stephen, say little old women in black. The population of the neighbourhood suffered more; they probably had no saint to protect them. The batteries which were placed to the right of the spot where we were standing swept the whole region.

"They were up there," says my friend, showing me a piece of rising ground on the east, between two small woods of slender, quivering trees.

The whole plain was, in fact, under a hail of fire for a week.

We stopped at Chauconin, which I remembered as a gay and smiling little spot on the banks of the Butel, more interested in the price of its cheeses than in international politics. "It was in this village," wrote Arthur Young in the eighteenth century, "that I felt the real beauty of rural life in France." Now, alas, but a tragic memory survives of all that seemed destined to live on under the chestnuts, "a haunt of ancient peace." The little grey houses are in ruins ; the Virgilian farms burnt to the ground ; the quiet streets deserted. On the walls still standing, the flames have left their black traces and the Virginian creepers twist their charred and leafless limbs.

The same picture of desolation meets the eye at every turn on the road we are slowly travelling. . . . Here a farm in ruins, farther on a blackened châlet, on the horizon a truncated tower. . . . The inhabitants have not even the solace of cursing the enemies of their country as the authors of all this desolation. The French shells were no less cruel than the German shells. This is war ! War, which has scattered tombs over plains covered yesterday with flowers ; war, which has emptied the mills once so proud of their wealth ; war, which has depopulated the

poultry-yards in which the Gallic cock sang his eternal hymn to the sun ! . . .

Of Barcy, another rustic gem with its slender belfry and clematis-covered walls, nothing is left but a heap of stones dominated by the shattered spire of the church.

“It was at Monthyon,” said my friend, “that I experienced the greatest anguish of my life. If we take this road we shall arrive at once, passing through the battle-field the whole way. . . . The Germans passed along there. . . .”

Graves, pathetic rustic graves, mark the fighting line in this valley. Each row of crosses indicates a trench. The little tricolour flags flutter in the cold wind as if making despairing signs to us. Here and there we come to a deep hole or a fallen tree. They are the marks left by shells. The side roads, which are very animated in normal times, are deserted. Even the flocks, one of the chief sources of wealth in Brie, have migrated to plains less ravaged by machine-guns. War has transformed what was an orchard into a burial ground.

War !

“It was here,” cried my friend, when we arrived at the entrance to Monthyon, “here, the cradle of the great philanthropist yearly com-

memorated by the French Academy ; here. . . . It was evening, two days after the German retreat and at the height of the summer. . . . The heat was unbearable, and I had just come up the incline on foot. . . . I would have given anything for a glass of water that was not Marne water, Marne water tinged with blood. . . . Suddenly, however, my thirst was slaked. . . . I saw nothing, neither shadows nor animals, nothing but empty space. . . . But from the street opposite came a sort of suffocating blast, something that seized me by the throat, filled my mouth with a bitter taste, and impregnated my whole face. . . . Never have I experienced such acute physical anguish."

"And what was it ? "

"It was the stench of death."

My friend paused to draw a deep breath, still under the obsession of his past sensations.

"The stench of death," he repeated, "a horrible smell, at once brutal and subtle, something sharp and vicious, a breath that seemed to me almost palpable, a damp, thick, black exhalation. . . . Yes, black. . . . And I saw it coming towards me through space, and enveloping me, always seeking my face, and making a sort of spiral round my body."

Another silence.

Presently, turning to the road by which we had come, he murmured :

“Let us go. . . . There is still a smell of death here.”

We retraced our footsteps in silence, always among the graves. A cold, clear air, wafting the scent of dry hay, filled our lungs. The poor warriors are no longer rotting on the ground ; they are sleeping in deep furrows. The yellow leaves rustle lightly in the tree-tops. In the distance the pale yellow sun touches with gold the clouds that float playfully across his disc. There is a melancholy peace in the landscape, suggestive of piety, calm, and kindliness. But my companion continues, fetching long breaths, as if to expel the last of the gruesome emanations that still torment him :

“And to think that at this moment there are many places, many, many places, in Flanders, in Austria, in Alsace, in Prussia, in Serbia, where other men are smelling what I smelt that evening.”

When we arrived at Varedde, still in the midst of graves and ruins, an old man came to meet us and begged in the name of God for alms for the poor of the neighbourhood. All are now poor, and all help each other. If the Curé were still

with them, he would be the one to beg. But the Germans have carried him off, no one knows where, with other householders who could not or would not collect the sum that was demanded of them. The old man shows us a paper printed at Geneva, in which the names of these unfortunates, sixteen in all, are given. Four of them were shot at Coulombs. Others have written to the Red Cross Society from Erfurt. There are five, the Curé among them, of whom there are no tidings. "If only you could find out where they are!" The villager, no doubt, took us for persons of importance because of my friend's generosity.

"We, too, were rich," he said, "some more, some less; we had our gardens, our cows, our savings. . . . Now we have nothing. . . . We gave them all we had, to induce them not to burn our village. . . . When they went, they left us nothing but their wounded who could not walk, and instead of treating them as they deserved, we nursed them until an ambulance came from Meaux and took them away. The poor wretches were pitiable to behold when they were left behind; they were crying, thinking we should take our revenge on them. . . . The gentlefolks at the Château sent us things for them . . . though they had not much cause to be

grateful to the Germans. . . . Fortunately they were not here during the invasion. . . . The officers, who knew the district well, asked us if the owners of Gué had gone, and when we said yes, they were furious. . . . Just go and see how they left the Château. . . . They smashed everything. . . . Everything . . . the fine tapestries that had come down from ancestors, the splendid furniture, the pictures that were brought from Paris every year, were all destroyed. They took the billiard table out into the park and used it for a target. It was terrible ! . . . When our people came back they found the table laid. The Germans had been about to have a meal, and they had brought up the best bottles from the cellar. . . . A shell sent them off in haste and fasting. . . .”

The old man pointed to the north, to the spot where the Château de Gué stands, in the village of Congis. Then, looking towards the street of Varedes, where we were, he concluded :

“ After all, we haven’t so much to complain of, in comparison with other places near here, where there is nothing left but ruins. Here, thank God, there was no fire. . . . The invaders only sacked the houses and carried off some of the inhabitants. . . .”

And, indeed, in the overwhelming misery of the invaded districts, those who have only suffered pillage consider themselves happy when they think of those who have lost all, even life itself, in the flames or under the shells.

Meaux, which seemed so melancholy to us a few hours before, presents itself to us as a very happy spot when we return to it in the evening. Its houses are intact and its inhabitants are not begging their bread. The ancient millstones are still grinding corn in its mills. The shops are open, and in the cafés people are discussing the latest news from Verdun, Ypres, and Reims. The housewives we meet returning from the Ave Maria have not the pinched, terror-stricken faces of the poor women who live among the ruins of the neighbourhood. The Germans who passed through one morning have left nothing but a memory, and no one fears to see them return. The provincial calm is unbroken. The city has resumed its life in the august shade of its Gothic towers, far, far from Paris, and also very far from the plains where other battles are raging. Only the venerable bridge, blown up by dynamite, still speaks of horror. But the town says resignedly : “ This is war.”

THE RUINS AND HORRORS OF SENLIS

November 25.

WE are making our way towards Senlis through the defiles of the Forest of Ermenonville. The dry leaves spread a carpet under the trees which the wind ripples now and again. There are mysterious murmurs in the air, and a sigh seems to breathe through the foliage. What shall we find of the delightful town that we saw so often in happier days, dreaming its homesick dreams in the shadow of the old cathedral? . . . To me, more than to the rest, this dread is full of infinite sadness. My companions merely recall spring wanderings on the banks of the Nonette, and cheerful rustic luncheons in the pleasant Valois gardens. But I have something of my life in this region of airy groves and slender spires and murmuring springs. . . . Ah ! Senlis, with thy white meadow gleaming through the thickets of the forest, Senlis of my bygone holidays, warm, sweet, idyllic Senlis, full of discreet smiles and indulgences. . . . God knows if anything will be left of all I loved there twenty

years ago. Perhaps I shall find only ruins on the site of that hospitable inn on whose walls painters now famous portrayed their Muses in straw hats years ago. . . . In a single day the city which centuries had overlaid with the shades of eternity was transformed into a heap of ruins. The views Parisian papers have been publishing for the last three months showing the ravages committed by the flames, and the significant title, "The French Louvain" printed below, make me fear heart-rending visions of hatred and desolation. However, nothing could be less tragic of aspect than this district where the most graceful images mingle with the most exquisite memories. Even now, in spite of winter, willows and poplars retain the melancholy grace which made Jean Jacques Rousseau say, when he was dwelling at a hermitage near Ermenonville: "There is nothing so lovable as Nature." For here, indeed, solitude is "lovable," with its narrow valleys amidst the forest density, its quiet liliated pools, its frolic streams playing at hide-and-seek beneath the ferns. The fairies Gérard de Nerval met at evening, when he came to calm his nerves in this region, still lurk in the parks of the country-houses we see in the distance. Far below us we see the lordly mansion of M. de Girardin,

visited by royal philosophers of the eighteenth century. Famous villages, sung by poets, pass successively under our eyes: Chaalis, Montlognon, Borest. . . . The little house of the author of "Emile" must be in one of the neighbouring thickets, so propitious to those who came in quest of poetry.

But, unhappily, this is not what we are seeking at present. The days of quaint meditation in the track of the lonely wanderer have passed away, and our vehicles, very unlike that which brought Madame Roland to Ermenonville, dash along impetuously that we may arrive at Senlis this same morning.

The forest has already disappeared.

In the middle of what the inhabitants of the *Île-de-France* call "the desert," a desert of white sand studded with green oases, the towers of the cathedral rise before us.

We have arrived. . . .

At the inn, where we draw up at the entrance to the town, an old review containing a fine historic study by Jacques Boulanger enables us to reconstruct in a moment what perhaps no longer exists. "We must wander under the ancient trees of courtyards and through the streets which have preserved their picturesque

names, Rue Rouge-Maille, Rue du Heaume, Rue du Chat-Héret, Rue du Puits - Saint - Sanctin, the Rue aux Fromages, or the Rue aux Pigeons-Blancs. Was it not beneath this ivy-clad wall with its ancient milestones that Des Grieux paced, lamenting Manon ? Did not M. de La Guéri-taude lodge in this rich mansion with the sumptuous doorway ? Here and there in a garden, at the corner of a street, in a cellar, the Middle Ages and the Renaissance reappear : here is the Hôtel-Dieu of Gallande and its lofty hall, the Inn of the Trois Pots with its carved sign, its angel, its milestones, its lofty façade of brick with stone string-courses ; here is the fifteenth century—gargoyles and windows with flamboyant mullions ; here the sixteenth—lintels with armorial bearings, pilastered walls, medallions. At the Carrefour de la Licorne which, thank God, has not been re-christened Place Jules-Ferry or Gambetta, an old sign displays three scholars arguing with a monkey, who holds a jug and offers them a beaker ; farther on, the rampart still dominates the Fosse-aux-Anes, where the Leaguers made a breach in 1589 ; farther still, a red stump of the Roman wall seems to be hiding the blood of its wounds under the ivy ; and suddenly, at a turn in the street, the spire of Notre Dame springs

into view, adorning the sky like a flower born of the city."

We saw from afar that this spire was still intact, dominating the city. As at Reims, the enemy's cannon refrained from the sacrilege of destroying the airy architecture of the towers. But as at Reims, the roof of the sanctuary was set on fire.

The municipal officer who receives us tells with legal coldness what happened at the beginning of September. The tragic circumstances which placed a portion of communal power in his hands do not seem to have disturbed his provincial calm. The scarf he wears is still stained with blood, and traces of the terrible scenes enacted in his office are still visible. He, however, receives us as if we had come to ask him for a marriage certificate or a surveyor's valuation. And, to tell the truth, his simple, austere, and sober official dignity, far from shocking, pleases us. We feel at once that we shall not be told fantastic stories like those of some the pre-prandial customers at the inn poured forth to us :

"Ah ! gentlemen," said these worthy citizens, "if you could have seen the horrors that took place here."

And interrupting each other every moment, they spoke of old women burnt alive, of little

girls mutilated, of men buried in the courtyards of their houses, of priests strung up by the heels in the midst of their blazing churches. . . .

The councillor expresses himself sedately as follows :

“After the battle of Crépy-en-Valois, when the English troops entrusted with the defence of this district retired southwards, the town understood that it could offer no resistance, and began to make arrangements for surrender. The Mayor, M. Odent, an upright and vigorous old man, in whom all had perfect confidence, was the first to resign himself to the painful sacrifice, without uttering useless lamentations. When a German colonel entered the town, M. Odent went out to meet him ; he declared that the population, which was much reduced at the time, because of the exodus of the richer element, would refrain from all hostile action against the conquerors. The colonel, a rough Prussian, asked if he had published a notice enjoining his fellow-citizens to abstain from all dangerous manifestations. As all the printing works were closed, such a notice had not been printed. At this moment shots were heard in the neighbourhood. ‘The inhabitants are firing on our men,’ cried the Prussian, and, seizing his revolver, he added,

threatening the official with it: 'If you move I will kill you.' Hereupon a Saxon patrol began to march through the streets, seeking the notable citizens to take them as hostages; and as they did not know the people, they arrested all they met in an absurd manner, poor workmen and rich tradesmen alike. Three citizens who tried to hide in a tavern when they saw the Germans were at once shot as suspicious characters. The women, hearing what was going on, closed their windows and hid in the cellars or garrets. An officer who had been sent out of the town to see where the shots had come from, came back in a few minutes saying that there had been an encounter between an English rearguard and a German advance guard. 'Never mind,' said the colonel, 'I consider this an act provoked by the inhabitants, and I hold the town responsible. The Mayor and the hostages will be sent at once to headquarters.' This order was carried out. More than twenty of our citizens, bound elbow to elbow, were marched to Chamant, preceded by our poor M. Odent. What happened there would be incredible if I had not heard it from those who survived the ordeal. An officer forced all the prisoners to lie down in the mud, and after hearing the report sent him by the colonel, gave

orders to shoot a few of them on the spot. Another officer intervened, saying it would be better only to shoot the Mayor. On hearing these words, the Mayor rose and declared that he was quite ready to die, his one request being that they should spare the other hostages, who had done no wrong. The officer who had proposed his death approached him and shot him dead with a revolver ; then, by order of the general, five others were executed. The survivors remained lying on the ground by the corpses of their comrades, until at nightfall they were released. The next day the Germans entered Senlis, and began to sack the houses. An army doctor, who was billeted on the arch-priest of the Cathedral, told the worthy abbé that his chief had determined to treat Senlis as they had treated Louvain. 'The pretext,' he said, 'is that the inhabitants fired on our soldiers ; but the real object is to make an example, and terrorize the invaded districts.' The arch-priest hastened to the Hôtel du Nord, where the general was lodged, and offered his own life to save his parishioners from the horrors of fire. The officer to whom he spoke jeered at him, and advised him to go to his church and pray for the souls of Joffre and Poincaré. The truth is that most of these Germans were

drunk. Not content with what they found in the cellars of the town, they sent to the Château de Chamant, famous for its stocks of old liqueurs, and got over a thousand bottles of old cognac. As to champagne, the number of cases they took from the shops is simply incalculable. The officers went themselves to fetch these, and made the owners carry them to their quarters, generally giving them a kick or two as sole payment. The rank and file were content to loot the taverns. Close by here, in the Rue de Paris, there was a rich owner of a wine-shop, in whose house a group of Germans established themselves for two days, to eat and drink their fill. When there was nothing left, the drunkards flew into a rage; they killed the master, an unfortunate man called Simon, and wounded his servant, one Vaner. At another wine-shop, a sergeant rode in on horseback and struck his head. When his comrades saw him covered with blood, they fired at the mirrors, and tried to kill the owner of the shop, but fortunately he was able to escape. But the most terrible day was that on which they had to clear out of the town at the approach of our victorious troops. They set fire methodically to the houses where they had been quartered. You will see for yourselves what horrors. . . . And mingled with these

horrors, as is always the case, there was something grotesque. . . . On September 3, about eight o'clock in the evening, some soldiers who were passing along the Rue Apport-au-Pain singing, imagined they saw some men lurking in the work-room of M. Durand, a tailor, ready to attack them. 'Go into the shop and hold up your hands,' they cried. The mysterious men never stirred. Then the soldiers began to fire, but the more they fired the more stoutly the men stood their ground. At last a sergeant approached, sword in hand, and saw that his adversaries were merely the tailor's dummies. . . . There was a general laugh . . . but, alas ! to avenge themselves for this irony of fate, the Germans set fire to the shop and killed the tailor. . . . The Press of the whole world has reported these murders, especially that of the Mayor. On the other hand, I have never seen the slightest allusion to the unhappy beings who perished as living ramparts for the Germans. When they entered the town the German soldiers seized every one they met on the road, and made them march in front of them, so that they might be killed by the bullets of the French garrison. The secretary of the Red Cross Society and the superintendent of the Hospital of Saint Vincent were also used as shields, in spite of their armlets,

to enable the Germans to fire whilst sheltering behind them. . . . All these worthy people perished, there is no doubt. . . . Only one was able to get away, a publican named Bleuze, who was two whole hours between the German and French bullets. This device of *parangons* which no other civilized nation ventures to adopt in these days, is a good indication of that relapse into barbarism which marks Germany's conduct of war. . . . Drinking, looting, and burning are the elements of their campaign. . . . In their frenzy they spare neither churches, convents, nor homes. . . . The first night, a party of Prussian officers, after clanking their swords along the deserted streets, knocked at the door of the Convent of Saint Joseph. The Superior came to receive them in person, and, with perfect calm and dignity, refused to allow them to enter as they proposed. 'Pretty nuns,' they cried, 'pretty little saints !' and roared with laughter. Finally, seeing they would not be allowed to enter, they said they would go away if they could have a few bottles of champagne. 'There is no champagne here,' replied the Mother. 'Yes, yes, there is . . . in France there is always champagne, even in the convents. . . .' Suddenly there was a sound of galloping hoofs in the street. One of the officers

went to the door and muttered : ‘The general.’ Then they begged the nun to close the door and hide them, as they would be punished if the general found them there. ‘When he has passed we will go away without asking for anything,’ they promised. The Mother Superior closed the door, and ten minutes later, when the street was silent again, she opened it to let them go away. But, in spite of their promise, they said they would not go without the champagne. The Superior gave them the bottles of quinine wine they keep in the infirmary, and thus induced them to take their departure. ‘They were drunk,’ said the holy woman by way of excusing them. It is true. They were all drunk, always drunk. . . . You shall see for yourselves what their drunkenness means. . . .”

We saw indeed. As at Reims, at Arras, and at Soissons, at every step in sweet Senlis there are traces of fire. Whole streets are now mere tracks of desolation. Everything became the prey of the flames : the noble buildings which preserved the memory of the glorious days of the bishopric, the admirable monuments whose emblazoned walls were the pride of the whole district, all that was splendid, and with it all that was humble, the little houses built with the fruits of

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years of patient economy, the almost rustic shops of the poorer quarters, everything, in short, which was within range of their incendiary bombs. But here the spectacle is even more dreadful than in other cities, for it is at once obvious that man rather than cannon, has been the destructive agent; that not war, but the frenzy of the barbarous horde is to blame. The army doctor told the arch-priest the truth. The Prussian generals had determined to leave an example in the plains of the Île-de-France, no insignificant example like Courtacon; they decreed the mutilation of the beautiful ancient city, dear to the soul of the poet.

Ah ! Senlis, fair Senlis, grey and peaceful, thou who in the midst of thy leafy groves, in the stately shade of thy mediæval towers, seemedst like some Sleeping Beauty in the Wood, how little didst thou dream twenty years ago, when I was learning within thy girdle of ivy-clad stone my first lessons in melancholy, that one tragic evening the voice of the cannon would wake thee with a wild alarm. In thine endless reverie thou hadst many yearning dreams, but never any nightmare of war's alarms. Thou livedst in thy sumptuous past rather than in thy modest present; thou livedst drowsily, always cherishing

forgotten images, always murmuring names that have lost their significance, and in thy desire not to be disturbed by the noise of trains passing through thine outskirts, carrying the fever of Paris into more active regions, thou madest thy bells sing unceasingly the delusive psalm of bygone splendours. Life seemed to have condemned thee to the slowest and gentlest of deaths. Thou, who still calledst thyself an episcopal city, hadst not even a bishop. Thou hadst only thine infinite peace, perfumed by the roses of thy deserted pleasancess, only thine emblazoned walls. . . . But what harm did this mournful grace do to the world ? What could life gain by breaking in upon thy dream ? . . .

As we left the town, one of my companions murmured, as if to palliate what he had seen :

“The necessities of modern warfare are terrible.”

It would be truer to say horrible.

Mercifully, the forest still exists, intact, peaceful, and happy. Cottages sending up a smoke not of arson, speak of the happy life of the fields, as peaceful now as in the most distant centuries.

A wholesome, penetrating scent of damp earth rises from the thickets, amidst the rustling of dead leaves we stir and disperse. Old woodmen

pass slowly, and seeing the rapidity of our motors, they stop and look after us, as if wondering why men can want to go so fast. In the evening calm something of Rousseau's spirit seems still to linger among the branches, preaching peace, kindness, love, and fraternity. Near Villemetrie, some very ancient ruins suggest a halt. Here, too, the memory of a war still lingers, of a far distant war. "King Philip-Augustus," says the chronicle, "built this abbey to commemorate the Battle of Bouvines." And before the immense ramparts harmoniously destroyed, not by flame but by time, the chivalrous figure of the great Capet appears as if to show how different war was in those centuries which knew neither shells nor melinite nor repeating rifles, when kings fought like soldiers. On August 27, 1214, Philip-Augustus, sitting on the rim of a fountain, was quietly dipping his bread in a pitcher of wine, when Robert La Truie announced to him that the Emperor of Germany, Otho IV, was approaching with his allies, the Flemings and the English. "They won't let me eat in peace," cried the king as he sprang to the saddle. And he added, smiling: "They shall pay me for this, by the help of Messire Saint-Denis." Shortly afterwards the battle began. The Germans, when

they saw the King of France at the head of his knights, bore down upon him, lance in rest. "The good King," writes Guillaume le Breton, "brandished his sword to right and left, and always advancing through his enemies, he overthrew those who were surrounding him in great numbers, and went on, cleaving a way before him, and seeking Otho, until one man, more daring than the rest, severed the meshes of his cuirass between his breast and his head. The point of the sword, wielded by a vigorous hand, penetrated so far that it grazed the skin, and the King, wishing to pull it out, recoiled, but he was unsuccessful in his attempt, and measured his length on the ground. Stretched out in a place unworthy of his lineage, he had no rest, for the horses bruised him and the barbarians harassed him. His natural strength, however, enabled him to rise and mount his horse again, with the help of his followers. Hereupon Otho arrived on the scene, followed by his fiery Germans. Philip-Augustus put spurs to his steed, and, full of rage, threw himself upon the infantry that had unhorsed him. Robert La Truie wounded the Emperor's charger, and it rolled over with its rider. Gerard von Horstmar sprang to the ground, and offered his horse to Otho. Oh, noble

German knight, all honour to him who thus sacrificed himself to save his master ! Otho took flight, and behind him, that his shame might be less, the Saxons also fled. The King of France made the Count of Flanders, the Count of Boulogne, and the Earl of Salisbury prisoners, and carried them to Paris, where he was received in the manner befitting a great conqueror."

This page, recalled now, in the very plains where the troops of the Emperor, the heir to the crown of Otho, have passed, leaving no chivalrous traces, is even more depressing than the ruins of Senlis, because the memory of those distant days suggests a ruin more disastrous than that of towns : the irreparable ruin of souls which can no longer show generosity in the midst of tragedy, as in the days of our forefathers.

THE GERMANS AT COULOMMIERS

November 27.

TO those who come from Meaux, Varedes, or Barcy, Coulommiers seems an exceptionally lucky town in the midst of the tragic plains of the Marne. The Germans passed through it, the Germans lodged in these houses, the Germans established their batteries in these regions. . . . And yet there is nowhere the slightest trace of violence. Every one is at work, smiling and peaceful. In the streets the women are talking of fairs, the price of cheese, the weather, while their children play on the footpath. In bygone days, it seems, the castle and the fortifications gave the village a sombre and sinister character. All that remains of these ancient defences are ruins gracefully draped in ivy. Its very church, once a fine one, which might have evoked memories of the days when the soldiers of the League committed so many excesses, is a mere shadow of what it was ; its tower is mutilated, its walls are crumbling. What indeed is the past to the positive and practical villagers of the twentieth century ?

Milking their famous cows and cultivating their rich gardens, they live neither envied nor envious, and even at the most tragic moments they boast of having better luck than their neighbours.

"The Germans?" they exclaim when they are questioned. "Yes . . . they stayed here a few days."

But no one makes the desperate gestures we noted in other places. No one laments, no one utters loud complaints.

Why, indeed, should they complain? When the English who had charge of the district saw the enemy advancing, they might have tried to resist, and then the storm of shells would have fallen on the roofs. Happily, the English went off, saying, "We will come back, never fear." And the German troops entered without firing a shot; instead of making themselves unpleasant they established themselves quietly in the places allotted them by the Mayor.

The innkeeper who serves our luncheon in the Place du Marché is a perfect type of the amiable provincial, talkative, obsequious, and jovial. Gulp-
ing down a glass of wine at our invitation, he relates his experience of a month ago with ingenuous humour. To have seen von Kluck, already almost a legendary figure, and Prince

Eitel Friedrich, son of the Emperor, is not given to every mortal. Here at this corner they passed twice on foot, followed by a brilliant escort. And how haughtily they carried themselves, from the old general to the youngest sub-lieutenant ! It cannot be denied that these warriors have a lofty bearing, nor does our host attempt to deny it. No, indeed ! Tall of stature, with gleaming helmets and clanking swords, they marched as if on parade. When the private soldiers saw them they became motionless as stone statues, holding their breath. The women came to the windows to see them pass.

“ But,” I asked, recalling the ungallant or over-gallant stories we had heard elsewhere, “ were not the women afraid of such terrible men ? ”

The innkeeper laughed :

“ Why, they came out and danced the polka with them here in the market-place ! ”

Then, more discreetly, he corrected himself :

“ I mean the light women, of course.”

Honestly, when I heard this I was greatly relieved. The thought that William II's soldiers had everywhere behaved like a horde of barbarians was a real grief to me. Yesterday, after a sad pilgrimage to the battle-field of Champaubert, when we were trying to forget the mono-

tonous horrors of actual warfare by evoking Napoleon's epic campaigns, our cicerone brought us up near the Château de Baye. The crosses planted thickly over the plain showed that the struggle had been very fierce just here. At every turn we came upon a burnt farm. The picture, indeed, was the same we had looked upon for a long time past in that fair and hapless region, where one of the most tremendous conflicts of the age was waged last September. But it was neither graves nor ruined farms that our guide wished to show us, but the Château itself. There was nothing strange in the exterior. Its high walls rose intact, dominating the seignorial park. On the other hand, in the interior all was desolation. The antique furniture, relics of past generations, was lying in disorder about the galleries. The glass cases were broken open. Empty bottles lay in heaps on the stained carpets.

"Madame la Baronne has given orders that nothing is to be put in order yet," said the woman in charge.

And taking us into an empty room, she showed us the following letter, written by the Baronne de Baye to the *Temps* two months ago :

"Breaking open all the numerous glass cases in a gallery 45 metres long, the Kronprinz

stole everything, weapons, priceless jewels, medals, precious vases, chased gold cups, and all the superb presents given by the Tsar to M. de Baye as mementoes of his missions to Russia. From the Museum of 1812 he stole admirable icons, sketches, and miniatures, etc. He carried away those things which have a value above all others, souvenirs. He had the best of the furniture and pictures packed up, selecting them with a taste and knowledge astonishing in such a Vandal, but in his precipitate retreat he had to leave the last cases behind him. Our old servants, who remained staunchly at their posts, were weeping. Something of their souls was being carried off into Germany. God did not give the Imperial housebreaker time to murder them in the chapel, which he had not time to burn."

"Did you see the Crown Prince ?" we asked the housekeeper.

"I was not here at the time," she replied.

"But those who were here, did they see him, did they speak to him, how did they know it was he ?"

"Among those who occupied the Château for five days there was a young officer, tall, slender, and excitable, whom all the others treated with marked respect."

This was all the caretaker could tell us. And in spite of the zest with which she made us read her mistress's letter once more, she was not able to convince us. A young, aristocratic officer is not necessarily the heir to a throne. In the great moral agitation caused by invasion, the people of the district are obsessed by the most illustrious names. In all the villages and in all the towns, the men and women imagined they had recognized famous marshals. The shadows of von Kluck and von Bülow are in the humblest corners. "I saw them," say the people. And they proceed to sketch the portraits of blond warriors, proud, arrogant, and brilliant. As to the Kronprinz, whom all the world accuses of being the true author of the war, he is to be found in a hundred places at once on the same day. "He was there with his Staff," murmur the peasants of Vitry-le-François, showing a formidably entrenched cavern in which the fragments of a field battery are still to be seen. "It was here he stayed," cry the citizens of almost every town, pointing out the most imposing house in the principal square. Circumstances excuse all these fantastic ideas among the populace. But it seems to me very surprising that an Ambassadress, a great lady, a distinguished

woman who has been received at European Courts, should assume, when her servants tell her of a young fair officer whom other Germans treat with respect, that this was the Imperial Prince. In normal times Parisians would smile at such innocence or such irresponsibility. Nowadays the Crown Prince has thought it essential to his honour to give the Baronne de Baye an answer in the course of a conversation with an American journalist. "I am not a burglar," he said. Of course his word cannot be doubted for a moment. The housebreaker was another young officer whom the servants of the Château took for the heir to the throne because of his suite. Whoever he may have been, the traces of his pillage are there to testify against him. And whoever he may have been, his conduct saddens those who would fain find a noble soul in the warrior.*

* The French *Rapport officiel* gives the following account of the ravages at Baye :

"The next day we went to the Château de Baye, and there noted the traces of the pillage that had taken place. On the first floor, a door giving access to a room in which the owner had shut up various valuable works of art had been broken open. According to the statements of the caretaker, who in the absence of her mistress could not give us any precise idea of the extent of the damage done, the things which were taken were chiefly

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The painful impressions of the Château de Baye are pleasantly dissipated at Coulommiers. True, the newspapers spoke of thousands of bottles taken from cellars without the permission of their owners. But this was nothing. Goethe himself, in his reminiscences of the campaign in France, admits that at Somme-Tourbe he was unable to resist the temptation of looting in a cellar filled with generous wines, thus imitating the soldiers of the Duke of Weimar. What is really terrible and almost incredible is the methodical mania for killing and destroying of which the invaders were accused in a great many

Russian jewels and gold medals. We noticed that boards covered with black velvet, which must have been taken out of the glass cases, were stripped of some of the jewels that must have been fastened to them originally.

“Baron de Baye’s bedroom was in the greatest disorder ; a great many things were scattered about the floor, or had been turned over in the still open drawers. A flat writing-table had been broken open ; a Louis XVI chest of drawers and a cylindrical bureau of the same style had been ransacked.

“This room must have been occupied by a person of very high rank, for on the door was the following inscription written with chalk : ‘J. K. Hoheit.’ No one was able to give us any exact information as to the identity of this Royal Highness ; but a general who was quartered on M. Houllier, a Municipal Councillor, told his host that the Duke of Brunswick and the Staff of the 10th Army Corps had been lodged in the Château.”

towns. Of this fury happily no trace is to be found at Coulommiers.

Our cheery innkeeper has nothing but praise for those who were his customers for three days.

“At this very table,” he said, “an army doctor used to take his meals ; he spoke French perfectly, and kept on telling me how miserable it made him to see all the horrors of war. He was an excellent fellow, very delicate looking, with gentle eyes. When I asked him how his countrymen could set fire to towns, he replied that war is a horrible thing, and that all men are savages when they fight. According to him, traces of the horrors we committed at an earlier period are still to be seen in Germany, in the Palatinate. I saw the campaign of 1870, however, and I do not remember the Prussians behaving then as they have behaved now in Belgium.”

The innkeeper smiled slyly, and looking at us with a knowing air, he added :

“You know, the papers tell dreadful lies. . . . For instance, they said that here at Coulommiers we had been exposed to the fury of the enemy. . . . What will they say next ? . . . The woman who takes care of the house where General von Kluck lodged complains of having been insulted. . . . Well, do you know what the insult was ? . . .

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It was this : the general, hearing that the woman had two sons in the army, sent for her and told her that as soon as William II was proclaimed Emperor of France, he would take her two sons under his protection, and obtain commissions for them in the German army. If I had been in her place, I would have made fun of him to his face and thanked him. Raillery is the best method with the Boches. Forty soldiers came here who tried to be insolent at first. One of them, seeing me eating a piece of meat, came to my table, and asked for it. I paid no attention to him. He showed me his sword, and I told him I, too, had had one in my youth, in 1870, and that I had made good use of it in Alsace. However, as my man began to be rather troublesome, I went out and called an officer who was crossing the market-place. If you could have seen what happened ! The officer came in and applied a sound kick to the posterior of the swashbuckler, who at once ran out of the house. . . . All the others became as gentle as lambs. . . . My friend the army doctor told me that I must close at nine o'clock or I should be fined. At nine o'clock I clapped my hands and all the Germans went off after paying me religiously with French money. . . . For it is not true that they didn't pay.

The tobacconist declares that they took all his best cigars and never gave him a farthing. So much the worse for those who don't know how to take care of themselves. . . . As for me, they owed me nothing when they left. . . . At the hour when the general's band came to play in the market-place, the soldiers did not dare to come in here, because the officers were sitting outside listening to the waltzes. . . . They are in terror of their officers, poor devils ! . . . Seeing that I talked to a captain just as I would to the humblest private, they would stand gaping at me in astonishment. 'In France,' I said, 'a general is just the same as any other man ; we are not slaves.' They all questioned me about Paris, asking if they would be well received there, if it was true that all the boulevards were full of gay cafés, and that all the women were pretty. When they found a post-card with a view of the Champs Elysées or the Place de l'Opéra, they looked at it thoughtfully and put it away among their papers as a relic, thinking, no doubt, that in a few day's time they would be able to send it to their sweethearts from the Place de la Concorde. I was laughing to myself, for I was sure they would never get to the capital, But, of course, I said nothing. The doctor had advised

me not to enter into unnecessary discussions. . . . Ah ! that good doctor ! . . . God knows what has become of him. When our victorious troops were approaching and von Kluck went off in his motor-car in a hurry, the doctor came to see me, and said, trembling, that things were going badly, very badly. He sat down there, and in a minute he swallowed a whole bottle of wine to the last drop. 'Badly, very badly,' he repeated. Soldiers were passing between the carriages, and horsemen were galloping to and fro, carrying orders. The officers were shouting. We heard the roar of cannon in the distance. All of a sudden we saw a battery taking up a position at the cross-roads, here at the corner of the street, not at all to my satisfaction, I can tell you. But a quarter of an hour later a sergeant came and spoke to the artilleryman. The battery was at once removed. Only the doctor remained, still murmuring : 'Badly, badly.' I felt sorry for him, thinking our soldiers might arrive any moment, and I advised him to fly. You should have seen his face when he went away and saw that the square was empty."

"But the other inhabitants of Coulommiers," we asked. "Do you think their memories of the occupation are as painless as yours ?"

The innkeeper seemed to reflect.

"The others," he murmured. "Well, I don't know. You can see the town for yourselves. Not a pane of glass missing."

It was true ; neither a pane of glass nor a smile. Always affable and always animated, Coulommiers continues her life, a rich, busy, and gay little town. The young girls come to the windows to see us pass, and the goatskin motoring coats we have put on to cross the frozen plain make them smile with gentle irony. In the half-ruined tower of the church, a bell makes its youthful, very youthful, voice heard, vainly calling the faithful, who assuredly prefer to stay at home, meditating on mysteries less profound and more positive than those of religion.

My companions, who are looking only for the traces of shells and for memorial crosses in the neighbourhood of the Marne, feel a kind of disillusionment in this place where nothing dramatic happened, and where there was neither fire, nor blood, nor terror. "All this is not very interesting," they seem to say as they look at the uninjured streets. But I, on the other hand, feel so happy that I could almost believe my soul to have been inoculated with something of the innkeeper's jovial soul. A town which has seen dread war

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at such close quarters, which has been invaded and redeemed, and where not a single drop of blood was shed—this is indeed unprecedented and admirable. . . . Thrice blessed Coulommiers !

THE FIELDS OF RUIN ABOUT THE MARNE

November 30.

FOR a whole week we have been going over the region in which the vast tragedy of the Marne took place, and everywhere we meet with the same surprising spectacle ; a spectacle of desolation, mourning, and misery, mitigated by the incurable smile of the French race. Sublime French nation, which still has strength to smile even in the most agonizing days of its history, when the invader still treads its soil, when the flames he has kindled are still devouring its treasures, and its fields are still strewn with corpses. A promise of victory illuminating the soul of the country has sufficed to make all, men and women, old folks and children, forget their sufferings and open their hearts to hope.

“ Now,” say the peasants of Brie and Champagne, after describing all they went through three months ago, “ now there is no danger of their coming back again.”

And this thought consoles, encourages, calms, and fires them. Even avarice, the great fault,

or perhaps the great quality, of those who water the earth with the sweat of their brows, disappears in the present upheaval. All they have they offer, so that the struggle may be continued, and final victory assured. They have given their sons, and this is a good deal. They have given their corn and their horses, which is more. If a difficult day should come, they would give their old tarnished silver pieces that they have kept from generation to generation, hidden in some corner of their cottages, safe from temptation and greed. The great white oxen of Pierre Dupont's song are no longer the most precious treasures of these people. Above these, the selfish individual possession, rises France, sacred France, whose blood is flowing.

A little while ago we stopped at Allemant to see from the heights the immense marshes in which the Prussian Guard perished so pitifully and so heroically. Captain Vallotte, our learned and courteous cicerone, explains the manœuvre which enabled the French troops to hold the German rush towards Paris at this point, thanks to their artillery. For five days the little village was swept by a hurricane of shot and shell. In the plain, right away to the horizon, rustic crosses mark the graves of those who are resting in eternal

sleep, after giving their lives for Emperor or Republic. Gradually, as in the other places we have visited, the children of the neighbourhood come up, a little uneasy at first, and surround us. The oldest of the group, a boy of ten with large clear eyes, and a girl a little younger, pretty as a wild flower, point out the emplacements formerly occupied by the cannon.

“And where were you,” we ask, “while the battle was going on ?”

“Hidden in the cellar,” they say.

“So you could not see anything.”

“Oh ! yes, we did,” murmured the little girl.

And the boy, looking slyly at us, added :

“When maman was asleep, we went out to look at the firing. . . . It was like lightning and thunder, but much worse. . . .”

“What did you do for food ?”

“We had plenty of everything, because we had not given anything to the soldiers, then. . . . Now it is different. . . .”

There is not a village now that does not freely offer the little it has to the men who are fighting. The admirable wave of fraternity that in the higher political spheres has converted the most divided of nations into a band of brothers, manifests itself in the most touching forms in the

modest existence of the people. The rifle and the bayonet no longer inspire any fear among the poor. In the meanest homes, on the hearth that comforts the labourer, the best places are kept for the *piou-pious*, that they may dry their red trousers as they gaily tell stories that would have made the listeners tremble with fear a few months ago, and now seem to them ordinary, almost insignificant events. The bravery and love of martial adventure which a half-century of peace seemed to have stifled in the hearts of the people, awake once more at the sound of the cannon, with all the charming inconsequence and all the good-humoured generosity of epic days. How true is Gustave Le Bon's theory that all races, in spite of their apparent transformations, are essentially unchanged throughout the ages! At a farm this morning an old peasant showed us the bullet-marks on the tree-trunks. Bent and wrinkled, he seemed incapable not only of vigorous effort, but even of physical endurance. And his hands trembled as he felt for the holes in the bark of the apple-trees. His voice quavered and he spoke haltingly.

"As I do not see very well," he said, "I did not distinguish five Uhlans who had posted themselves under those black poplars, and I wondered

where the devil the bullets could be coming from. My old wife, who is very timid, thought they would come through the door and kill us both. Every shot rang through the garden and made the poor soul shiver with terror. I said to her, 'You mustn't be so frightened, old woman. You know I was in the thick of the firing, too, in 1870, and nothing happened to me. Everything is in the hands of our Lord Jesus Christ.' But she could not take her eyes from the window, and she asked me if the door was well fastened. 'I will go and see,' I said, and I went out there. Scarcely had I set foot in the garden when, bang ! I felt a blow in my side ! At first I did not realize what had happened. I thought some one had thrown a stone at me. . . . Then I felt something warm and saw I was all wet. . . . Well, thank God, it is only a scratch, I thought. It was a bullet that had gone right through me here, at the waist. . . . When one is old one doesn't want to die. It is not like the young ones, who don't know what the world is. . . . And then my old woman has no one but me, now that our son is gone. . . . 'It's nothing,' I told her ; 'don't be frightened. I'm just going to see after the fowls.' And I went off to the house of my chum, Félix, at the back here, and there they nursed

me. . . . I was in bed a week . . . and now I am all right again."

"Did you suffer much ? " we asked.

"No," he replied ; "the Germans couldn't kill one of the old 1870 lot ; if they come back here I'll soon send them about their business."

And then in a firm voice he added :

"But they won't come back, after the race they've had to get away."

Everywhere we found that the peasants looked upon the retreat of the Marne as a shameful rout for the Germans. In vain do the officers who pass through explain to them, with the noble candour of the cultivated Frenchman, that it was not a rout, still less a flight, but a hurried retreat after five days of disastrous but honourable fighting. The masses do not understand these subtleties. Having seen the troops of von Kluck and von Bülow retiring in disorder, their uniforms plastered with mud, their faces tense with terror, all their carts and wagons crowded with wounded, they feel that there is no doubt about the matter.

"If you had seen them when they were confident that they would get to Paris, how haughtily they marched out, and then how they came back, running like hares, looking round

every minute, you would have laughed at the change in them," said our interlocutors.

The saddest part of all this, however, is that all these visions of herosim and joy vanish when one sees the ruins heaped up along the highways, and listens to the stories told by the poor women in mourning who have sought refuge in the towns; when one lingers in the fields thick set with crosses, or notes the fragments of bridges on the river banks. . . . Ah! how different is war seen from afar with its grandeur, its splendour, its theatrical beauty, its stirring trumpet calls, from war at close quarters with its miseries, its atrocities, its flames, its heartrending deeds, its dead, rotting in deserted trenches. Even now we have just had a horrible sensation on one of the battle-grounds of the Marne. Captain Vallotte was pointing out the ingenious arrangement of some trenches which are still open, in which soldiers, hiding to fire, had cut little benches to sit on. As we approached a small wood, in which a few crosses marked the graves of those who had fallen gloriously, we saw two huge dogs run off. Mr. Jessen, the Danish correspondent, who has seen much of modern warfare, said :

“ In Manchuria and in the Balkans, everywhere

I have seen these same famished dogs looking for corpses to devour them.”

And the crows ! . . . The whole country is covered with dusky flocks ! Behind the armies here, as in India, the birds of death hover in endless flights, waiting for their gruesome feast, and croaking to celebrate the absurd folly of man.

The captain calls our attention to the pious care with which the French people dig and adorn the tombs of its heroes to guard against profanation. At every turn of the road, among the great wounded trees, improvised graveyards stretch away as far as the eye can reach. On every grave there is a cross, an inscription, a bunch of wild flowers. The peasants have collected the soldiers' red képis and hung them on the crosses. Here and there a little tricolour flag flaps in the cold winter wind. From a distance the burial-ground looks like a field of poppies. And they are all alike ; all have the same look of icy desolation. What was yesterday a granary of life is to-day a charnel-house. In their religious respect for death, the peasants do not sow the seed where they see the crosses. Accepting the loss of corn next year, they bow their heads and pray in silence.

What a sinister peace reigns in what was once an orchard ! We, too, breathe a prayer on this sacred ground. On those of this land and of the land beyond, on all those who fought and fell, on the poor little soldiers who perished under these skies some evening like this, and will never see their homes again, Our Father, which art in Heaven, have mercy ! And if the great tragedy which defaces Thine handiwork provokes Thy wrath, visit it not on them, who offered the holocaust of their lives on the altars of an ideal, but call to account those who armed their innocent hands ! . . .

Ah ! after all, perhaps the dead are not the most to be pitied ! The sons of these regions who will return some day victorious will find nothing of the villages that they left. These villages have become mere heaps of ruins. The churches where their mothers prayed for them have fallen to the ground. No one knows what has become of their parents, their friends, their betrothed, or even if they are still alive. War has passed like a torrent over the rich Île-de-France. For hours, for whole days, we have beheld the scene of desolation. Here there is nothing at all left ; the wind has carried away the very ashes ; and yet there was once a happy

village on this spot : Courtacon. . . . Down there a tottering tower overhangs a heap of ruins ; not a roof has been spared, not a wall has remained intact : this was Ribécourt. A little farther the river carries off in its current the remnants of another village, like the flotsam of a wreck. And below, in this dismal valley, what do we see ? . . . It is Champguyon, blackened, gutted, tattered, looking like the worn-out scenery of a theatre, Champguyon, which used to be considered a sylvan Paradise, hapless Champguyon, beloved of painters. . . . What grief we feel at the sight of it ! But we must not linger among its charred farmsteads. There is no time to weep over each ruin. There are so many ! . . . Poligny, less wretched than its neighbours, for a few of its houses are still intact ; Charleville on Marne, with its dismantled church ; Oyes, deserted, black and dead ; Creil, Choisy-au-Bac, Sommesous, peaceful Le Recoude, where not a single shot was fired, but which the Prussians burnt house by house and farm by farm, with roars of laughter ; La Villeneuve with its beautiful church, only the blackened walls of which remain ; Châtillon-sur-Morin, a nest of poets and painters, a little idyllic corner embowered in vines, where, alas ! even the vines

have been burnt ; Borest, near Senlis, tragic Borest, which looks as if it had been overturned and shattered by an earthquake ; Reuves ; Berverie ; Esternay, demolished from end to end, as if in fulfilment of some Biblical malediction ; Chauconin ; Senlis ; Barcy, enchanting Barcy, whose church was a gem, and is now but a tower pierced by projectiles ; the Château of Mondement, where the Prince Imperial stayed for two days, and which now looks more like a farm abandoned after a catastrophe than a lordly mansion ; the ancient Abbey of Saint-Gond, the ashes of which are still smoking.

It is impossible to move without encountering a ruin.

We pause for a moment in the middle of a garden, to see through a window what had happened inside a sumptuous villa. The flames apparently did not reach it. We notice a piano, the varnish of which still glistens, and a glass case, only the glasses of which are missing. The most heterogeneous objects, however, lie shattered on the ground ; dishes, vases, statuettes, silks, dresses, watering-pots, travelling trunks, books, saucepans. . . . What criminal hands can have dealt thus ruthlessly with the nest of this rich family ?

The answer is always the same : The Germans.

But is it possible that a great nation which has given scholars, poets, and legislators to the world, should have come in the fury of contest to outvie the hordes of remote centuries in futile barbarity ? Is it conceivable that men who study at Heidelberg, print at Leipzig, invent at Berlin, and trade at Hamburg, men of gentle manners, who are touched by the woes of "Werther," and tremble as they listen to "Parsifal," should fall into the most odious excesses of bestiality ?

No, I will not believe it. . . . I wish not to believe it. . . .

And yet the dark, mute witnesses stand there in the plains of the Marne, showing the marks of flame, pillage, and cruelty. And if the autumn rains had not washed away the pools of blood ! . . .

When we emerge from the fields of ruins and penetrate into the places that were not burnt, the smile on the faces around us seems to me almost criminal. To smile in the face of all this mourning ! Yet it is not for lack of feeling. When they recall the horrors they have undergone, there is not a face that is not convulsed. The vision of murdered peasants will never be effaced from their minds. But there is something among the inhabitants of Brie and the

Oise akin to what one sees among shipwrecked persons who, after losing all they possess, manage to save their lives. And there is also what Rudyard Kipling calls "the invincible shield of France," her smile, which is not a sign of weakness, but of strength, the smile which hides great griefs and incites to great deeds, the smile of Voltaire when he destroys, of Bayard when he dies, of Renan when he suffers. . . . Sublime people, how little they know you who, contemplating you among your ruins, do not realize that your smile is the divine flower of true heroism.

THE GERMANS AT ÉPERNAY

December 2.

WHO would suppose that this town has just lived through the most dramatic hours of its existence ? Its whole aspect is tranquil, silent, and even a little dull. Through the windows of the ground floor we note the pride with which each home exhibits its treasures, as at Bordeaux and Antwerp. Gilded chairs, marble tables, damask curtains and glass cases enclosing bronze ornaments abound. The servants wash the mosaic entrance halls as if they were jewels of price. The cupboards in the shops are full of hats loaded with feathers, costumes loaded with trimmings, and complicated ornaments. Many private carriages stand at the doors, waiting for their wealthy owners. The guide who has undertaken to show us the Abelé quarter, destroyed by the German shells, is evidently pleased to lead us along the wide grey avenues where the houses of the most illustrious families are to be found. "Count Claude Chandon lives here," he says respectfully ; "M. Mercier here ; here the heirs of M. Aulien Moët. . . ." Each name corresponds to a

famous brand, and I seem to be listening to a ceremonious *maître d'hôtel* reading over a list of champagnes. Unhappily, these benefactors of the human race who export the divine French gaiety in bottles do not seem to have the slightest notion of grace and lightness. Like the traditional clowns who make others laugh when they themselves are unspeakably wretched, they seem to sell all the sparkle of the vines and keep only the gloom of the cellar. The only idea suggested by the façades of their houses, which are not severe but pretentious, is that of costliness. This stone and marble must have been very expensive ; these iron gates must represent a great deal of money ; these gloomy conservatories are no doubt worth a fortune. But beauty is all to seek. Any one of the villages of the mountains about Reims, among their ancient vineyards, has a charm quite unknown here. Any one of the towns of 5000 inhabitants which have preserved the treasure of their walls and towers possesses more monumental buildings than this great millionaire town. For Épernay, which aspires to rival Reims, can boast neither a fine church nor an historic palace. Everything within its precincts is new. And the inhabitants tell you so with pride.

The Germans, however, seem to admire Épernay, and in the days of their triumphs one of the visible objectives of their forward march was to seize the town. Was it because Wagner lived happily within its walls ? It was, perhaps, rather the fame of its cellars, in which millions of bottles of champagne lie hidden. Ah ! those cellars, those wines ! Ever since the eleventh century when Pardule of Laon wrote to his friends beyond the Rhine the famous letters upon the excellence of the good *Champagnois* wine, the Germans have been obsessed by these Pantagruelian cellars.

“ Would you like to visit Moët and Chandon’s ? ” asks our cicerone.

And opening astonished eyes, he exclaims :

“ Four leagues of underground corridors full of bottles ! ”

In the industrial quarter we see, not bottles, but every kind of appliance for bottling wine. Each shop has its speciality, and all these specialities are designed for the same purpose. Here labels are printed ; there corks are sold ; a little farther on, machines for fitting on capsules are exhibited ; and then there are the little wire muzzles. . . .

We are most evidently in Champagnopolis.

When we arrive at the Hôtel de l'Europe, where Lieutenant D—, an ex-ambassadorial secretary, awaits us for luncheon, the first things to be placed on the table are the inevitable champagne bottles ; one before each guest, and then others upon a sideboard close by, waiting their turn. In vain did Captain Vallotte protest that we ought not to drink the sacred wine till after the final victory. In this district the foaming cup is obligatory. A local police official who is making an inquiry into German atrocities takes a seat at our table and, with the dryness of a notary, consulting the notes he has made in a pocket-book, gives us details of the four or five days the enemy's troops spent at Épernay.

“On September 4,” he said, “General von Platenberg, Commandant of the Imperial Guard, entered the town, and after having quartered his officers in the empty houses, he summoned the Mayor, M. Maurice Pol Roger, and threatened, not to shoot him, but to hang him to a lamp-post, for having cut off the gas and the water. The Mayor, showing no signs of fear, telephoned to the superintendent of the two departments, who replied that both were working as usual, and that no doubt in the houses complained of the owners had probably closed the meters themselves.

And so it proved ; as soon as the meters were turned on, the General had electric light, water, and gas. He was not appeased by this, however. A fire broke out in one of the suburbs, and von Platenburg told M. Pol Roger that if this happened again he would have him hanged. On the 5th requisitions of food began, and as the Commandant did not find them to his taste, he imposed a fine of 150,000 gold marks on the commune. Towards evening a wounded German soldier arrived at headquarters. On the 6th, hearing of the wound of the soldier, who could not explain how or by whom he had been attacked, the General exclaimed that he would hang, not only the Mayor, but also the leading citizens whom he had had arrested. On the 7th one of the Emperor's sons arrived and took up his quarters in M. Aulien Moët's house. Officers went to call on him, and they all went down together into the great wine-grower's cellars. In a few days they drank two thousand bottles of champagne. On the 8th the Mayor presented himself before the General, who had sent for him to accuse him of having taken down a German flag that had been hoisted at the railway station, and for the third time threatened him with death. The Kaiser's son, who was presented, intervened,

saying a new fine must be imposed on the commune. A Prussian captain, who had just been to inspect the station, came in at this juncture, and declared that the flag had not been touched. The General, far from calming himself, continued to shout at M. Pol Roger, and finally dismissed him like a servant. On the 9th there was bad news of the German army. The officers seemed anxious, and ceased to gather in the cafés. On the 10th the Emperor's son disappeared. There was a continuous departure of motor-cars. The Germans, defeated on the Marne, entered the town and made for the north. On the 11th the last Germans left, and the French Lieutenant de la L— entered Épernay at the head of a company. Immediately after this the bombardment began. The Germans had set up their batteries on the adjoining heights, and were trying to destroy the town, concentrating their fire more especially on the Abelé quarter. They killed a few harmless civilians, and set fire to an entire street. The French artillery replied, and the Germans fled, leaving a few guns behind them."

When the official had finished, the *maître-d'hôtel* who is filling our glasses remarks :

"It was here that the Staff took their meals. . . ."

And showing a bottle, he added :

“How they loved this !”

Everywhere the German warriors have left the reputation of heroic drinkers. Sparkling wine in particular seems to be the passion of the race. In little villages, directly they were installed in some humble inn, the first thing they asked for was champagne.

Turning over the leaves of his notebook again, the official tells us of the atrocities committed by the Germans. A little while since, according to him, a woman named Lheureux Lecomte, the owner of a vineyard at Le Baizil, died in the hospital. This woman had been obliged to take in an officer of the Prussian Guard, who behaved very amiably and politely the first day. But—here I prefer to transcribe the exact words dictated to us by the police officer :

“On the night of September 5 the officer forced Mme Lecomte’s little daughter, a pretty, fair-haired child of twelve, to get into his bed. The mother, informed by a servant of what was going on, rushed to his room, and weeping with grief and rage, implored the brute to leave her child alone. The officer, who was half naked, took his revolver and fired at the mother, who fell to the ground. Then, that the screams of the child might not be

heard outside, he shut all the windows and returned to his bed."

When the police officer had finished speaking, a painful silence fell on the company. No one could make the slightest comment. It was evident that all were thinking, with shame and sorrow and fear, of the wave of savagery that seems to have swept over the souls of men of this age. And I recall the tone in which on one occasion, hearing me speak lightly of the violation of women, one of my companions murmured :

"We all have daughters. . . ."

The vision of beloved ones rises before our troubled eyes when we hear these tales of cruelty and violence.

Lieutenant D. makes a gallant effort to distract our thoughts. He fills up the glasses and then asks the official if Sister Sainte-Barbe is still at the hospital.

"That woman is a saint," he says.

"A saint indeed," replies the police officer.

All the Sisters of Mercy have shown the most admirable kindness, courage and self-sacrifice ever since the beginning of the war. Neither invasion nor bombardment could induce them to desert their wounded. But among them all, the Sister Sainte-Barbe has been the most devoted. For

the last four months she has been at the bedside of suffering men, and no wounded soldier has ever pronounced her name without bringing her at once to his aid. When does she sleep ? . . . When does she eat ? . . . No one knows. Night and day she is at her post, always gentle, always attentive, going from one to another, and bringing to all the solace of her fairy hands and her Madonna eyes. The grace her words distil is a balm on which the doctors reckon for working miracles. At terrible moments, in the middle of painful operations, she alone can bring a little peace to the souls of those who suffer.

“ If every one were like you,” said a Republican Minister to her one day, “ we should all become Clericals.”

“ In times of great misery all men are brothers,” answered the nun.

On another occasion, the Prefect promised her a gold medal on behalf of the Government.

“ If it is gold,” she cried, “ send it to me at once that I may sell it for my poor people.”

When the Germans took possession of the city they wanted to make the wounded soldiers in hospital prisoners. An officer entered the great ward, revolver in hand. The Sister went to meet him, and quietly but very firmly declared :

"No one can come in here, as long as I am alive."

And no one came, except the wounded, who, whether friends or enemies, were all her children.

She spent three successive nights at the bedside of a blaspheming Bavarian lieutenant, without showing the slightest signs of impatience or fatigue.

"We could not calm him at all," she said, "until I spoke to him of his children. Then he began to cry, and the devil went out of him. . . ."

There is no one like her to soothe those who rage and toss in their agony.

"I do not propose to take you to see her," says D., "because I know that she dislikes praise and visitors."

"It's the same with the Mayor," adds the police officer.

As a fact, no one in Épernay seems to like visitors. The very town receives us coldly, so to speak. In the Rue Abelé, where after luncheon we examine the ruins caused by the Prussian shells, the passers-by barely answer our questions. Invasion, fines, threats are all things of the past. The only enduring things are work, wine, the vines. The roar of cannon that we still hear in the direction of Reims is less important than the

popping of corks. Twice, thrice, ten times over we are told :

“ You should see the cellars of the firm of Moët. . . . Four leagues of underground corridors full of bottles.”

We, however, persist in neglecting these. The town, calm, silent, full of pride and bad taste, interests us much more than a gigantic cellar. The women we meet in the main streets have something strangely provincial about them, and what is worse, their provincialism is of the wealthy sort. Hats covered with birds, strange furs, little shoes with silver buckles are much in evidence. It is obvious that all these Champenoises think themselves models of “ Parisian chic.”

In a café to which D. and I pay a visit alone we find the cream of the Épernay demi-monde. Here we note the same hats and the same furs we have seen on the ladies of the town. The proprietors of the great brands seem to be generous lovers, and the pretty faces we see account for their generosity. But the solemnity of these faces ! The Indian courtesans, who have something of the sacred character of idols, cannot be more hieratic than the fair frail ones of Champagnopolis. Looking at them attentively, we

begin to be afraid to speak to them, so haughty and even hostile do they appear.

As, after all, we cannot make up our minds to go away without finding out what impression the officers of the Imperial Guard made on these ladies, we venture to address the blonde beauty nearest to us.

“ A glass of champagne, Mademoiselle ? ”

“ Thank you.”

The “ Thank you ” is uttered without a smile, almost without a glance in our direction.

After the first glass comes a second, followed by a second “ thank you,” *demi-sec* (*half-dry*) like the wine we are drinking.

“ Were you here when the Germans came ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ Were you frightened ? ”

“ No.”

“ Were they agreeable ? ”

“ I don’t know.”

“ They must have tried to make love to anyone so pretty as you ? ”

“ No.”

This last “ No ” is not a *demi-sec*, but an *extra dry*. It is evident that we have offended her. To mollify her, we ask if her lover is an officer.

“ No.”

“And weren’t there some handsome fellows among the German officers ? ”

“I don’t know. . . . I didn’t look at them.”

This was the longest sentence we were able to extract from our neighbour.

As there was nothing more to see at Épernay, we returned to the Hôtel de l’Europe, where our companions were waiting for us to start.

“Anywhere else,” said D. as he got into the car, “we should be merry after the champagne we have drunk.”

This is quite true. But at Épernay even champagne is dismal.

UNDER THE BOMBS OF REIMS

December 5.

“**D**OWN there, in the distance, behind that row of trees, we shall see it through the mist. . . .”

We all look in the direction indicated by our guide, and we all wait uneasily for the doleful sight. We all ask ourselves if we shall arrive in time to see it. . . . We recall the accounts we have read in the papers with their sinister details of fire and ruin. Yesterday Pierre Loti was talking to us of the huge stone jewel, pronouncing a kind of elegy over it. “Masterpieces which man cannot reproduce are strewing the ground with fragments,” said the great poet; “the granite lace work, the ingenuous attitudes of ecstatic figures are gone beyond recall; a whole cycle of our history, quivering in the immaterial life of the sanctuary, has been hurled into the abyss, leaving but a souvenir.” We repeat his words with painful emotion, scrutinizing the horizon and evoking the memory of bygone days of peaceful enthusiasm, when we had watched to see the huge aërial towers rising in these self-same plains. No cathedral in the world has such a character

of harmonious majesty as Reims. Rising above the city, it is seen from an immense distance in the plain. Here the robust grace of ancient Christian France with its cortège of kings had found a fitting reliquary. The barbarism of every age but our own had respected it. The thought of what is happening to-day fills one not only with disgust but still more with shame. What opinion will future generations form of a century which proudly proclaimed its culture the while it burnt and destroyed the most exquisite creations of human genius ?

As we draw nearer the fog becomes denser. We can no longer distinguish even the nearest trees. A grey penumbra envelops the distant space. We calculate that we must be at the gates of the city, without having caught a glimpse of the wonderful apparition.

“ Reims,” murmurs our captain.

Then a great fear comes over us.

“ Is it still in existence ? ” we ask.

“ Yes,” answers our guide. It was hidden by the fog.

We cross a broad, silent avenue in the fog, and arrive at the Hôtel du Nord, the only hotel still open, where the chief of the police has arranged that we should find the meal which the martyred

city offers to those representatives of all Europe who have come to witness her agony.

The wine of the district gleams with its topaz reflections in the glasses. Reims still drinks champagne, even in these days of woe. The food is delicious. A fire crackles cheerfully in the lofty fireplace. And gradually as we talk of the war, and listen to tales of heroism, we begin to forget where we are. A lieutenant fresh from the trenches relates his experiences.

“At the front,” he says, “our soldiers are only about thirty yards from the Germans, and naturally they begin to fraternize with them after a bit. Very often there are conversations between the trenches. Our men, who are always joking, question their adversaries on all sorts of curious details. The Germans seem to be always pre-occupied with the food question. ‘What do they give you to eat?’ is the first thing they ask. And our *prou-pious* amuse themselves by telling the Germans that they are fed on chickens, pheasants, and hares. One day some Parisian wags sent a formal invitation to their neighbours to come and share a rabbit they had killed. A well-roasted rabbit was very tempting to the Teuton appetite. A sergeant, looking at it, said sadly at last: ‘If it weren’t that we might be

shot for it, I would come, even at the risk of being taken prisoner.' Then the Parisians, always good-naturedly boastful, threw the rabbit across to him, saying : ' Take it all, we have as many as we like over here.' The next day the Germans in that trench came over and surrendered, seduced by the good cheer of the French."

The lieutenant began another story, which promised to be very entertaining. But he never finished it. A shell had just fallen some twenty paces from our hotel. The powder reminded us that we were at Reims. The smiles died away on our lips. Our senior confrère, the editor of the *Journal de Genève*, rose, and, lifting his glass, invited us all to drink to French valour and French genius.*

* M. Georges Wagnière, editor of the *Journal de Genève*, has published his impressions in a volume called *Près de la Guerre* (A. Jullien, Geneva, 1915). The following passage describes our luncheon party :

"At the Hôtel du Nord we had a very animated meal. An officer made us laugh till we cried with his stories of the trenches. Two o'clock struck. Coffee had just been served. At that moment an awful noise shook the house and made us jump in our chairs. A shell had just burst in the Rue de Châtivesle, a side street which opens into the Place Drouet, a stone's-throw from the hotel. Our chauffeur came in to tell us that he had just seen a whole wall fall down. 'That's it,' said the hostess ; 'they always begin just about this time.' And very quietly,

"This German shell falling into this sacred city," he cries, "reminds us of our duty. At a distance we could not have believed that a great nation could show such futile rage against a city which is no fortress, but only a sanctuary of art. . . . Now, the Germans themselves have taken care to show us that barbarism is no empty word. We, faithful historians. . . ."

Another shell, bursting just under our windows, cut short his toast. One of our officers came in with a piece of shell which had just fallen at his feet. The mistress of the house, a lady in mourning, hurried in, begging us to take refuge in an inner room. Sims, the American journalist, proposed, on the contrary, that we should go out into the street and see the town under the fire of the enemy's cannon.

We left our half-emptied glasses and started on our tragic pilgrimage towards the Cathedral. The fog had lifted, and the sight began to appear before our eyes in all its horrible grandeur. A without any change of tone, she went on to ask if we would have any liqueur. A second explosion and then a third after an interval of two minutes made the window-panes and the crockery tremble. A police officer came into the room carrying a small fragment of shell which had fallen into his carriage. We got up and went to look at the cathedral. 'At your own risk,' said the officer who accompanied us."

group of children followed us, pointing out the shattered houses and showing us the fragments of statues they had just picked up. The police commandant was uneasy at the danger we were in.

“You must keep quite close to the walls,” he said, at the sound of an explosion in a neighbouring square. “I cannot answer for your safety.”

Nobody paid any attention to this advice. Our captain was the first to walk in the middle of the gutter, without any special haste. In every quarter sinister sights abound. The hail of missiles spares neither rich artistic gems nor miserable dwellings. There is equality in the German crimes. Here on the Place Royale is a three-storeyed house, completely gutted; here the old walls of the Rue du Cloître are reduced to ashes; here the Rue Saint Jacques has been converted into a field of ruins; here the Rue de la Grue, one of the oldest and most picturesque streets of the city, is obstructed by shattered walls; here is the Rue de l'Isle, still smoking; here the admirable Maison des Laines (Wool Exchange), now reduced to a few towers blackened by the flames; here is the Mont-de-Piété (national pawnshop), roofless and doorless, with tottering walls; here is the Cour Marceau, intact but yesterday,

and now a formless mass among ruins ; here an entire quarter, the Faubourg de Cérès, of which nothing remains but a few thick walls. . . . Indeed, there is no corner that has not suffered. Of the famous public buildings the only one which still raises its noble arcades in the middle of the Place de la République is the Porte de Mars. At Saint-Rémi, the Romanesque gem of Champagne, two shells have injured the west front and the apse. As to the Cathedral. . . .

“ Here it is,” cries our guide.

Oh ! never-to-be-forgotten sight ! From a distance of 200 metres the marvellous architectural mass rises before us, intact as a whole. The towers are still there, crowning the triple portico of the façade. Nothing is missing, neither the niches peopled with saints, nor the serrated crests, nor the crosses at the angles. Still beautiful, more beautiful than ever, like fair women who have suffered, it seems to scorn the attacks of the flames.

“ How miserable ! ” murmurs one of us, thinking of shattered glass and broken sculptures.

But I, on the contrary, feel an immense joy before the grandiose stone silhouette. The descriptions of the catastrophe had been so appalling. Reading the first telegrams relating to the fire, we began to think that the whole

building had been destroyed. "Only a ghost of the Cathedral has survived, and this will soon crumble away," said the newspapers. As a fact, the whole imposing jewel is there, proud and erect, looking loftier, firmer, more aërial, more sacred than ever. The flames have blackened the towers and gables. No matter. The figures praying in the sculptured shrines of the walls have been decapitated and cruelly mutilated. No matter. The famous painted glass which flooded its aisles with fiery light, and enshrined its rites in the heart of a ruby, has disappeared in the flames. No matter. Stripped and bare, the sanctuary is still the same, because it preserves its great mystic soul. As we gaze at the cathedral, the shells continue their cruel and senseless task. What can be the object of these strange artillerists in thus wreaking their fury on a city containing only women and children, stone saints and phantom kings? . . . The French troops are in the country a long way off. The cannon a German general professed to have discovered near the Cathedral never existed. There is, nevertheless, a storm of shells. Every minute the dismal whistling sound pierces the air, and the silence is broken by an explosion. Little children, accustomed to the sight, amuse themselves by following the

flight of projectiles, and calculating just where they will fall. Now it is the railway station which seems to be serving as target. The Hôtel Continental has just fallen in, says a policeman, who is running to fetch stretchers. A few steps farther on, another informs us that the hospital is on fire, and that it is impossible to save the wounded from the flames. On every face there is a look of suffering resignation. Living as by a miracle the inhabitants await their last day. The firing is very capricious. The explosions are now distant, now near, and then less frequent; then they come hastily, one after the other; then they cease, to begin again later. It is only from noon to 2 P.M. and from 7 to 9 P.M. that peace may be reckoned upon. The German warriors never forget their luncheon and dinner-hours. One must dine well if one would kill well. As they digest their savoury sausages they amuse themselves by their puerile and infernal game. After the railway station the Cathedral seems to attract their thunderbolts again. A shell has fallen quite near . . . another, nearer still. What an awful noise is caused by the bursting of the steel.

“Let us get out of the way,” cries the police commandant.

At the same moment, close before us, thirty paces from the statue of Joan of Arc, a sudden harsh shock makes itself felt. The café facing the Cathedral has just received its *marmite*,* and after the explosion we hear a sinister cracking sound. . . . The doors fall out, the roof subsides, the pavement is piled high with rubble. . . . Then there is silence, silence followed by a dull groan that makes our blood run cold. . . . One of us, Dr. Bjorne Eide, makes his way to the smoking café, and tends the wounded, fortunately only two in number. If it had been a little later, the hour when customers come to read the papers, the Germans would have made a hecatomb of old men, one of those hecatombs that seem to give them so much pleasure. The face of the waiter whom our colleague is succouring is nothing but a blackened wound. The eyes and mouth are no longer distinguishable ; all one sees is a bleeding mass which emits a slow and plaintive sound, a sound which is not a sob but a kind of lament, a rhythmic murmur, a chant which gradually dies into silence. . . . The other wounded man lies unconscious in a corner, and were it not for a slight trembling of his lips, we

* *Saucepan*, the slang name given by the French soldiers to the high explosive shells.

should believe him to be dead. In the street the children make comments and comparisons. What for us is an extraordinary spectacle, so moving that it has struck us all dumb, is for them a customary, almost a trivial occurrence.

“It’s the same every day,” they cry.

And looking up they try to see the whistling, threatening shells as they approach.

“Why don’t you go away ? ” we ask.

The answer is always the same, an answer at once resigned and hopeless ; the answer of the poor, accustomed to be victims whatever may happen. For of the hundred and twenty thousand inhabitants of Reims, the only ones left in the city are those on whom fortune has frow^{ned}. The rest, the owners of the palaces on the Boulevard de Waterloo, the great wine growers, the heads of the factories whose chimneys rise in the environs, are at Bordeaux or Paris. Those who have no money, unfortunate old men and hapless children, where should they go, and what could they take with them ? Here, at least, when the little house of one is shattered, that of another offers him shelter. A tender solidarity unites the beings who live beneath the menace of the shells.

“There’s not much to choose between being

killed by a shell at Reims or dying of hunger elsewhere," the old people seem to think.

As for the children, they never think of death; they amuse themselves looking at the tragic play of the flames, running to the spot where there is a new ruin, to pick up fragments of shell, and talking of what they have seen.

"Close by here," says a lively little dark-haired boy, "there is a house which has just fallen in."

The police commandant, tired of giving us unheeded advice, makes up his mind to speak authoritatively. We are to return to our hotel. Then our captain, still amiable and still calm and cold, reminds us that our hostess promised to tell us the things she has witnessed during the last three months.

So leaving the Cathedral, which stands divinely impassible in its pathetic grandeur, and the groaning wounded man, and the square where Joan d'Arc bestrides her bronze charger, and the children still seeking fragments of shell, we come back silent and exhausted. Projectiles fly across our heads with ominous whistlings.

We regain the hotel and soon afterwards the bombardment dies down. Every ten minutes a shell will burst again, but no longer in the centre of the town; they are falling in the distant poor

quarter. The salvoes, it seems, have been fired in our honour, not, as some of our confrères seem to think, with the idea of murdering inoffensive journalists, but because of the unusual movement caused by our motor-cars. The Germans see everything and hear everything. The environs of the town are full of spies who count the carriages that enter, the men that go out, the houses that fall, the victims that succumb.

When a party of workmen tried to go up on the Cathedral roof to mend it a shell forced them to disperse.

“They won’t let us save the sanctuary from ruin,” said the vicar in despair to Pierre Loti.

Haunted by the idea that the attack on the lines at this point will come from Reims, everything that happens in the town fills them with uneasiness. They imagine the masons the Archbishop had sent to cover in the aisles of the church to be military observers. It was not surprising, therefore, that our eight motors, escorted by artillerymen, should have been taken for a threatening advance guard, and that the batteries of Brimont should have honoured us with volleys to which we had no claim.

The hostess shakes her head sadly, as if to reproach us for our involuntarily provocative act.

"If we want a little peace," she said, "we ought to shut ourselves up in our houses and keep perfectly still. . . . When the town is quite quiet the enemy throws not more than ten bombs between luncheon and dinner. . . . But directly there is anything unusual going on, we are treated as we have been to-day. . . . I don't know how we are still alive. . . . The months this has been going on! If my husband were not at the war I should have closed the hotel and left long ago. But as he is in danger, I want to be in danger too."

The two waiters, an old man and a boy, look at their heroic mistress with respect and terror. They, too, would be glad to go, and if they stay, risking their poor lives, it is because they will not forsake her. The old man, questioned by one of us, murmurs :

"It is madness to stay here."

The youth smiles and is silent.

"Three months ago," continued our hostess, "on September 2, when we did not even know that the Germans were so near, the Mayor published a proclamation announcing that the town was in danger of attack, and calling upon us all to deposit any weapons we had in our houses at the Hôtel-de-Ville. The agitation that

evening was tremendous. The rich people were leaving the city, the poor were laying in stocks of provisions, the troops of the garrison were falling back upon Épernay. . . . Those of us who were left feared a siege, an attack, everything, in short, except what we saw next day and the following days. On the evening of the 3rd, indeed, a detachment of Prussian officers occupied the Town Hall, and forced the Mayor, a very energetic and dignified old man, to pass the night there with them. The anxious population in the streets could not make out what was going on. How could the enemy have got in thus ? . . . No one knew any details of the battles that had been taking place, nor what the retirement of our troops meant. . . . Some talked of the siege of Paris, the taking of Paris, the capture of the President of the Republic. . . . The men were weeping with rage, the women who remembered the war of 1870 told the most awful stories, declaring that nothing could save us from the fury of the Germans. . . . The hotel was full of people asking for food. . . . On the 4th a general with his staff came and demanded a million francs and an immense quantity of provisions. We had to find bread, vegetables, and meat for over 100,000 men every day. The Mayor was parleying with

the general when a shell suddenly fell at the door of the Town Hall. A minute afterwards there was another, and then a third. . . . The officers, livid with rage, threatened to burn the town, and seized their revolvers, ready to kill all the officials present. The Mayor, who knew perfectly well that it was not the French who were attacking, sent a police officer to pick up some of the fragments of shell, and when the general examined them he was convinced that it was his own batteries firing from Le Meneux. A motor-car was dispatched at once with orders to cease firing, and a few hours later the Saxon regiments began to enter the city in order, with one of the Emperor's sons, Prince August Wilhelm, at their head. It was he who saved us from pillage and cruelty. On the pretext that two of his emissaries had disappeared, General von Zuckau wanted to shoot the Mayor and make us pay a fine of fifty million francs. 'You can murder me if you like,' answered the Mayor. The furious general laid his hand on his revolver; but the Prince stopped him with a glance, and at once gave orders that the civil population was to be respected. I must say that the latter behaved admirably, and with a tact and dignity which even the German commended. The young women shut them-

selves up in their houses to escape from the dangerous attentions of the military. The tradespeople opened their shops as usual, thus proclaiming that they had no fears. The Mayor, in spite of his advanced age, showed extraordinary activity in averting any disagreeable incidents. But the finest example of disinterested charity was given by the schoolmistresses, who became hospital nurses. Mlle Fouriaux, the superintendent of the first ambulance, received and nursed the German wounded no less solicitously than the French wounded. One day when I went to fetch some blankets I saw bearded Uhlans in tears. When they were taken prisoners they thought they would all be shot, and they found they were treated with maternal kindness. When the Prussians entered the city, the French wounded were got off to Épernay, that they might not be made prisoners, and only the German wounded were left. Mlle Fouriaux and her companions continued to nurse these until September 12, the last day of the occupation. A Saxon doctor who superintended the removal of these wounded men declared that the nurses deserved a reward. 'Our conscience is our reward,' they replied, 'and we do not look for praise.' And would you believe it? . . . one of the first buildings destroyed in the

bombardment was the hospital. The Red Cross flag is no protection whatever."

"How did the German soldiers behave during the occupation?" asked one of us.

"They behaved well . . . the common soldiers at least. They walked about in groups, and if they had no money, they would ask for a glass of something to drink in the taverns. The officers did not ask; they just took what they liked in the hotels and private houses. And their haughtiness and insolence! They were so arrogant and so insulting that it was unbearable. . . ."

The hostess turned to the old waiter, who threw up his arms with a doleful gesture.

"When they had to go, after the battle of the Marne," continued the good woman, "they had lost their pride. . . . They had not even time to carry off what they had stolen. . . . You remember, Pierre?"

The old waiter smiled slyly.

"But the worst of it is," said the hostess, "that they have never ceased bombarding us ever since. They want to destroy what they could not keep. And I think they will succeed. Yesterday, when the hotel next door was shattered, the stones fell into our courtyard. . . . I thought

to-day that it was our turn for a shell. But I shan't go away. . . . No. . . ."

The old waiter muttered "madness!" once more.

And so it is, undoubtedly, an admirable madness that keeps all these people under the hurricane of bombardment. The Germans themselves declare that they cannot understand such obstinacy, such a passion for the soil, such a resistance to perpetual menace. Like Goethe a hundred years ago, when he saw the peasants of the Argonne living quietly in the midst of the fury of Valmy, they ask what secret charm the soil of France has, by virtue of which souls are so deeply rooted in every village, every town, and every country district.

"I stay because of my husband," says our hostess.

All have some sacred pretext when, in their sublime patriotism, they excuse their heroic conduct. The children are fearless because they are children, and the old people because they are old. . . . There is a crowd around us when we go to our motors, a crowd curious to see us, to see what the shells have done, eager in fact to live a life of incessant danger, emotion, and terror. Groups gather in front of each fresh ruin, discuss-

ing the details of the drama. A tobacconist's shop is on fire, and the smoke of the burning cigars rises in thick spirals, evoking gay exclamations from old men whose poverty has forbidden them to light their pipes for months past. In the square little children are quarrelling for fragments of shell. Women are searching among the débris for pieces of gaily coloured stuff, and when there is nothing more to see in the town, they turn their eyes to the north, and there watch hard by the cross-fire of the French and German batteries.

For the battle has been raging since the middle of September at the very gates of Reims.

As we return our captain stops the motors on the hills to the west, to show us the distant battle. Evening is beginning to fall. A light mist, which does not, like the fog of the morning, hide the buildings, but merely veils their contours, and gives them mysterious shapes, hovers over the wide panorama. Over there, among the hills, is the terrible Brimont, where the cannon, which were not able to destroy Paris, carry out their work of devastation and destruction. . . . Nearer to us is Courcy, where French and Germans fight for the ground, foot by foot. Nearer still is Bethény, with its almost Biblical name, bleeding, violated, sacrificial Bethény. It would be useless

to try to discern the movements of the troops. In this trench warfare nothing is to be seen on the honeycombed soil, even at a distance of a hundred paces. The only things clearly visible are the flames of the bursting shells and the columns of smoke that rise, straight and leisurely, in the icy air. The crash of the cannon comes in muffled thunder to our ears. The shells burst in the plain, one after the other, all alike, all in the same places, with mathematical precision. From time to time a louder, closer, more lugubrious sound makes us turn our eyes towards the city which continues to receive its daily missiles every half-hour or so, as if to keep it well in hand. We see the Cathedral afar, more beautiful, more stately than when we looked at it close by, and in the dying twilight the towers are dyed with soft roseate tints.

“ Say good-bye to it, for it is getting late,” says some one.

And this insignificant phrase in the sad evening atmosphere takes on an emotional value that depresses us as if we were leaving something of our life behind among the sacred walls. Will this good-bye be a final farewell, or a temporary parting? Some day, we who are now departing will come back again to see what has been left.

Shall we find the great sanctuary still standing there, proud and sombre in its martyrdom ? And shall we meet again the kindly people who received us and accompanied us through the streets !

The hostess, watching us set out for less dangerous regions, dared not answer our " *Au revoir* " by an " *Au revoir* ." I seem still to see her pale face, calm, serious, and resigned. I still hear the old waiter murmuring, " *It's madness !* "

Oh God ! To think that the people of this city took three centuries to build the most exquisite of temples to glorify Thy Mercy ! . . . What a place of woe is the world Thou hast created !

VISIONS OF JOY AND WOE

December 10.

WAS it because just now, as we were crossing the Place de l'Hôtel de Ville at Châlons, we saw a shop with the sign "Products of Spain" and the window full of oranges, melons, and bottles of muscatel ? . . . Or because of the innumerable seventeenth-century churches, fragrant with incense, murmurous with prayer, and starred with candles ? . . . I cannot say. But I know that during our rapid passage through Châlons, I was pursued by a feeling of home-sickness that made me attach importance to details in themselves perfectly trivial. The grey palaces of the Saint-Jean quarter, too large and too numerous for a town of 25,000 inhabitants, seemed to me to suggest an ostentation more befitting idealistic Old Castille than energetic Champagne. And then the ancient convents, the noble cloistral houses, the immense Cathedral of Saint-Etienne, worthy to vie with the finest in the world, the façade of Les Vinets, which recalls Valladolid, the high mysterious walls that evoke Toledo, all, in fact, and

more particularly the tranquil, grave, and silent atmosphere, made me forget France and the war, and feel as if I were in the heart of Spain.

My companions laugh at me, and to banish my obsession they show me the vast plain in which we are to seek the tragic visions of yesterday and to-day. But these plains do but aggravate my home-sickness. Are they not known as the Champs Catalauniques? Arid and solitary, and grey with the true Castillian grey, they stretch northward without an undulation, open from time immemorial to Germanic invasion.

“Here,” said Goethe, after the defeat at Valmy, “the same events recur throughout the centuries.”

Here, indeed, William II's barbarians, like those of the King of the Huns, met with a decisive check in their triumphant course. A thousand yards from the Roman highway on which the legions of Aëtius passed in the fifth century, the troops of von Kluck and von Bülow gazed impotently at the historic panorama where more Teuton than Latin warriors sleep their last sleep. What rage and what melancholy must have been in the eyes of those men! Rugged, hostile, and tempting, the plain does not seem to be defended at all. As far as the eye can reach

there is no sign of a fortress, a camp, or a battery. Scarcely, however, does the enemy attempt to advance a step, when a hail of projectiles, coming no one knows whence, forces them to hide precipitately in their trenches. And while the two armies thus remain stationary, life goes on in the regions south of the Champs Catalauniques.

The road our motors take is one of the most frequented in Champagne. Here and there we come upon an inn full of muleteers. The commissariat wagons pass along rapidly, taking fresh supplies of provisions to gunners and guns. Women are working in a leisurely fashion among the vines, tying the dry branches to the props which in a few months will support great clusters of grapes. But for the occasional burnt houses to be seen around, nothing would suggest that we are in the tragic zone.

“Notre Dame de l’Epine,” exclaims our guide, showing us two Gothic towers.

In this region of cathedrals the apparition of a great church is frequent enough. Every town of medium importance has its marvellous temple. For centuries master masons, aided by thousands of workmen, raised great poems of stone to the glory of the crucified Saviour.

But what is strange here is that the town does

not exist. Scattered round the feet of the church some hundred small houses nestle among the trees. And thus isolated in the open country, with nothing to suggest episcopal pomp, the building rises in the vast bare space like an absurd caprice.

“No doubt at some earlier period there was an important centre here where we see only a miserable village,” says one of our company.

But this was not the case. There is no record in history of a more important settlement than that of to-day. As to the legend, the only thing it commemorates is the appearance of the Virgin among the brambles that grow here, one evening in spring, to bless a poor shepherdess. Rustic piety determined to celebrate this miracle sumptuously, and by a miracle even greater it raised this artistic marvel, which, had it been situated in a great capital, would have been as famous as Notre-Dame de Paris. Lofty and aërial, carved like a jewel, with its two unequal towers and its triple portico covered with naïve sculptures, the basilica of the Thorn is worthy of its sisters at Châlons, Laon, and Soissons. In days of old its painted glass, like that of Reims, bathed its aisles in many-coloured fires. But alas! as at Reims these relics of Christian art served the

Germans as targets, not in these days, but long ago.

At every step we come upon traces of the invasion. Farms destroyed by shells are so frequent that we scarcely turn to look at them. . . . War is war.

"Here, however," explains Captain V— when we arrive at Auve, "there has been no war. No . . . not a single shot was fired in this town."

Nothing remains of Auve, not a house, not a farm, not a street. The blackened ruins look like a vast and desolate stonemason's yard. The traces of the flames are seen in sinister spirals on the ruined walls. All the household plenishings are in ashes.

We leave our motors in the road and go into the town to view the master-work of the incendiaries. In the distance a half-ruined tower attracts us. We make our way to it among the shapeless fragments, seeking in vain for some indication of what happened here a few months ago. What was Auve like before the irruption of the German hordes? Its extent seems to suggest that it was more than a village. Behind the stones we discover spaces that were doubtless gardens. A few tall iron gates lie all twisted at the bottom of the walls. Nobody, however, can

tell us exactly if the inhabitants were rich villagers or citizens of Sainte-Menehould who came to spend their summer in its leafy shades. Not a soul is to be seen. At the corner of one street we find an open strong-box. The church, a village church, is gutted, and on its altar a Joan of Arc on a light pedestal has survived. The Maid of Orleans, whom bishops burnt alive, seems, now that she is dead, to be proof against the flames. At Reims her statue remains intact among the smoking beams of the Cathedral. At Sermaize her image stands out from a calcined wall. Bishops will no doubt turn the miracle to account later on, and take the Aube marble to some future Lourdes. Meanwhile she stands here alone, dominating the ruins.

But no, she is not alone. From out the vestiges of a dwelling emerges a livid, trembling phantom. It is a young woman, tragically beautiful. When she sees us she turns her great dark eyes upon us, and examines us anxiously, as if she feared that we had come to trouble the gruesome peace of her necropolis. Her nervous hands pass caressingly over some shapeless object she has just picked up. Our captain advances and asks her a few questions.

"It's all I have left," she tells us.

And she goes on at once to tell us of her husband, a doctor who perished in the flames ; of her life, the happiest life ; of her house, a nest of love.

“My piano,” she murmurs, pointing out a dark patch. “My bed,” she adds, looking to the right.

She stirs the ashes with her foot, and stoops to pick something up. She takes a few steps backwards and turns her back to us. As if no longer conscious of our presence, she continues to search with her blackened hands for something which is not there, something which was her joy in the past, something which no longer exists, but which, in her madness, she dreams may rise again from the embers.

At our exit from Aube we meet the custodian of the church, who tells us the eternal story of all the martyred places of the district. The Germans arrived one day at the beginning of September ; they occupied the houses and pillaged the cellars. They did not shoot anyone. Very confident in themselves, they talked of Paris and their triumph. After a short time, a horseman brought news of the defeat on the Marne. Then, in a fury, they prepared to decamp, but first they set fire to the place.

“And the woman we have just seen?” I asked.

“Ah! poor creature!” he cried. “She spends whole days searching among the ruins and talking to herself. . . . The Mayor of La Chapelle came to take her away, but it was no use. She sleeps there in a wooden hut she has had put up, and sometimes at night she wanders about among the ruins, calling her husband. . . .”

The custodian adds :

“She was the richest person here. She even had a motor-car. . . .”

Half an hour later, when we arrive at Sainte-Menehould, we are still haunted by the heart-rending vision of the burnt village and the demented woman. The gaiety of the streets, the animation of the people, the lively curiosity of the children shock us like a sacrilege. How can they laugh here when there is such a heart-breaking picture but a few miles off? The inhabitants of the town do not even seem to be alive to the tragedy that surrounds them. Proud of their Rabelaisian reputation, it is evident that they plume themselves on living like the musketeers of yore, eating, drinking, and singing to the roar of cannon. How many times throughout the centuries this town has been taken, and gloriously recaptured! All wars and all revolutions have left their traces

within its walls. The Spaniards were here before the Prussians. But nothing has robbed Sainte-Menehould of its appetite and its gaiety. Even to-day the landlord of the inn where we stop to lunch, tells us of the tricks he played off upon the Germans in September. For here as elsewhere the Germans, of course, gave proof of an insatiable thirst and appetite.

“I put vinegar labels on my oldest bottles,” he said, “and so they did not drink them.”

But the best joke was the trick of the chromolithographs.

“Do you see those pictures,” he cried, showing us a series of eighteenth-century French engravings, charming in their spritely malice, their ironic grace, and French elegance. “When the Boches came I was afraid they would carry them off, for they take everything, and as I had not had time to hide them I thought of a device. I ran to the market and bought twenty chromos representing coarse scenes of monks and fat wenches in Flemish public-houses. When the Boches saw them on the walls they hastened to put them into their bags, and despised the pale engravings.”

In the large dining-room where our meal is served, dishes giving forth savoury smells pass

and repass from table to table. An enormous fireplace in the background makes a patch of red with its crackling flames. A servant comes in every minute, bearing bottles and glasses. A dove coos the quarters on a high black clock like a coffin. Love and death are mingled in the talk of the officers around us, as in an Asiatic poem. And I recall the words in which Alexandre Dumas summed up the soul of the city after having spent a week here :

“It is a republic of men, women, and animals, of restaurant-waiters, of gay servant-maids, of cooks in white garments, of stoves, barrels, of the clatter of spits, pots, and pans, of cards, of playing children, expiring turkeys and fat sleeping dogs.”

Presently, to excuse the appetite with which we are attacking our meal in these disastrous times, I quote Camille Desmoulins’ celebrated phrase, accusing Louis XVI of stopping at Sainte-Menehould during his flight to eat an enormous dish of pigs’ feet :

“Sancho Panza crowned.”

We all feel ourselves to be more or less Sanchos in this atmosphere of laughter and gluttony. A pale woman in mourning, who has come to Champagne to look for the remains of her husband among the crosses of the battle-field eats

like ourselves. She is a Greek with a profile like that on an ancient coin. Beside her, a Sous-Préfet in uniform is talking of Varennes, twenty kilometres off, where the Germans are still entrenched, and from time to time he cries, looking towards the window :

“The cannon—listen to the cannon.”

All day long, in fact, the noise of bursting shells in the distance travels as far as here. But this does not affect the thirst or the appetite of anyone. The modest champagne not yet “champagnized” we are drinking is so good when it leaves barely a thread of white foam at the edge of the glass. And the historic pigs’ feet, which are eaten bones and all, are so delicious ! . . . In our character of Government guests we are offered the best of everything by our host, and overwhelmed with civilities by our neighbours. A captain of the Territorials, a regular Porthos with his enormous moustache and his athletic shoulders, tells us stories of the trenches.

“Of course it is more comfortable here than there,” he says ; “but really it is not so bad down there either. . . . During the last few weeks we have been trying to amuse ourselves a little, for only the artillery has had work to do.

In my company the one thing that is barred is melancholy. Devil take it ! one must make the best of life, and leave long faces to those officers with single eye-glasses who look as if they lived at High Mass. Last week we heard that in a trench in front of us there was a Bavarian prince who had fought like a lion a little while ago, and who, far from ill-treating his soldiers, behaves like a father to them, so we determined to give him a proper serenade. One fellow had a clarionet, another got a violin at Verdun, another manufactured a flute. With these and a drum, we could ask nothing better. . . . Well—bearing in mind the musical knowledge of my executants, I wrote the programme, and after ornamenting it as best we could, we rolled it round a stone and threw it over to the Germans. At the stroke of four, after a rousing rataplan, rataplan, the concert began. The Boches on the other side applauded, without daring to show their heads. . . . ‘Don’t be afraid,’ we called out. But there wasn’t a sign. They wouldn’t have shown their noses for an Empire. . . . At last I got up on the parapet, unarmed, and sat there bâton in hand, conducting the *Marseillaise*, which all our chaps were singing together. Then an extraordinary and very fine thing happened. About

thirty yards off, a German officer sprang to his feet, and putting his hand to his cap in a martial salute, he stood listening to our song. I saw him there, quite close, upright and calm, without the slightest fear. We could have killed him, of course, if we had wanted to ; but, on the contrary, when our boys had finished their piece, they shouted to him, ‘ Bravo, Boche ! ’ I stood up too, and saluted him.”

Captain Porthos emptied his glass and concluded :

“ It must have been the prince, of course. . . . If we take him prisoner some day, we will give him another serenade, for he is a gallant fellow ! ”

The Scandinavian, Swiss, and Dutch journalists, unused to this gaiety in the midst of tragedy, take notes feverishly, and ask for names. The honest Frenchman smiles, but prefers to retain his incognito.

“ I am a good paterfamilias in ordinary times,” he says at last, “ and when the war is over I shall give up all these larks.”

Then, as if foreseeing the future nostalgia of the present hours, he adds :

“ After all, this will have been the time of my life.”

When we set out again, enjoying the cigars

given us by the landlord, the landscape begins to seem less monotonous to us. Sainte-Menehould has been as it were a plunge into ancient, romantic, chivalrous France. Smiles still linger on our lips, and Porthos beckons to us from afar, bidding us remember his lesson of good humour. The dense green masses of the Argonne shut out the horizon. The tragic defiles in which Goethe saw Brunswick's soldiers weeping, wind in sinuous furrows through the thickets. Day, a day of northern winter, grey and icy, is dying. At regular intervals we hear among the trees the crackle of shells bursting in the woods.

We are upon one of the most terrible of the battle-fields.

"We will come back here," says our captain. "It is late now, and we have to get to Verdun."

The cars roll along in the forest, through the loud rustling of branches lashed by the wind. Behind us we leave La Grange-aux-Bois of bloody memory, bristling with lances. As we pass we see Les Islettes, where the great effort of the French artillery is concentrated. Presently the penumbra swallows us up. A mysterious smell of leaves rotting in the marshes, of exuding resin, and perhaps also of dead flesh, floats in the cold air. Musing on contradictory impressions

of horror and enthusiasm, we remain silent, wrapped in our goatskin coats.

Suddenly, in an oasis of light, an unexpected vision brings us to a halt.

It is Clermont-en-Argonne, one of the hundred places burnt to the ground, a mere field of débris, like so many others we have seen. But the twilight gleams and the position of the ruins on a height which commands the road, gives the picture the appearance of a fortress among flames. The sun, indeed, seems to be lighting Bengal fires among the shattered walls, and through the breaches made by the shells, the chimneys still standing look like turrets. A deathly silence hangs in space.

“On !” cries our guide, fearing to be late at Verdun, where General Sarrail expects us.

On then, on, with our visions, our pain, our melancholy.

Sainte-Menehould and its Rabelaisian gaiety are already very far away.

LORRAINE THE BURIAL-GROUND

I HAD heard Maurice Barrès describe Lorraine as "the most beautiful burial-ground in the world," and I pictured the regions of the Meuse and the Moselle as a kind of northern Castille, arid, sublime, and devastated. But when I found myself among its splendid trees, gazing at its harmonious hills, and listening to the murmur of the innumerable streams that ripple among the ferns, I felt a delicious surprise. "Is this the burial-ground?" I asked. The voices of Nature greeted me on every side, speaking of life, of energy, of hope and health. A little way off, in chalky Champagne, the Catalaunic plains look so desolate that all who traverse them must be seized with a kind of anguish. But when the defiles of the Argonne have been left behind, the whole landscape is covered with flowers. The villages that perch on the hillsides are like Christmas toys, and the humblest vegetable-patches look like gardens. As to the more populous centres, even in these moments of war and misery, their thoughts seem to dwell very little upon death.

We have arrived at Bar-le-Duc, which Maurice

Barrès considers "the centre of emotion" of the province. I have been walking about the town for several hours, looking in vain for something sad. In the ancient church of Saint-Pierre I saw Ligier-Richier's famous skeleton, and heard the popular legend from the lips of a priest. On the death of René de Châlons, Prince of Orange, his widow wished to commemorate him in a Christian manner, and instead of having him represented strong and handsome as he had been in life, she commissioned the great Lorraine sculptor to model a figure of him as the worms would leave him after a time. It is easy to imagine what a Valdès-Léal would have made of this task, after seeing his pictures at Seville. But Ligier-Richier was neither a Spaniard nor a mystic. At once realist and idealist, he carved the body in a grey marble, showing its ravages, but preserving its fine athletic lines and its noble juvenile pride of bearing. Through the decaying flesh the muscles stand out vigorously, and thus, far from producing the gruesome impressions to which less pathetic mortuary statues give rise, it turns our thoughts to the eternal myth of life coming forth from death. "Thou who wouldst fain suggest to us the terrible phrase *pulvis eris*, I feel inclined to say to the famous skeleton, thy

mournful immobility barely inspires us with a passing melancholy, because, through the veil the worms have pierced we perceive the immortal soul of the virile race, ready to animate new existences eager for the fray." These words, which had not crossed my lips, continued to haunt my mind like a refrain throughout my wanderings in Bar-le-Duc. Before the ruined towers, which for centuries resisted the assaults of ten cities, before the walls, dismantled long ago by cannon, before the noble dwellings now deserted, before all that in the ancient capital of the Barrois evokes bygone splendours for the poet, the same idea of eternal resurrection obsessed me. Bar-le-Duc no longer boasts a sovereign, a chancellery, a parliament, as in former centuries. Kings preceded by heralds no longer come to greet the ruler of the province in his palace. No stately processions now pass to the sound of drums and cymbals along the way of Baquis, which led to the jousting-ground and the lists. No longer do great ladies in rich brocades assemble on the terraces, listening to the pages who recount deeds of chivalry. . . . Of that brilliant and tumultuous past, we have no more than a clock upon a mediæval tower, a stone bridge between two alleys, a church fragrant with

incense, and a few coats-of-arms in the doorways of ancient dwellings. Yes, in the church of Saint Pierre there is something more to evoke memories of the past, the fifteenth-century picture, a little faded now, which shows us the plan of the ancient city, its lofty walls dominated by five enormous donjons, its proud citadel which no warrior could ever escalate, the high façades of its palaces, its churches, and its convents.

But if Bar-le-Duc considers itself a cemetery because of this, it may be asked to compare itself with other cities, once royal likewise, which, having ceased to be so, have not had strength enough to persist in living actively. Compare thyself, Bar-le-Duc, with Toledo, Avila, or Segovia, and thou wilt realize the difference between life and death. Without thy Dukes, thou art alive as in the fairest days of thy fortune, and thou mayest say with pride that in thy modest civic breast some atom of the world's future is in process of elaboration.

While the cannon of Saint-Mihiel thunder night and day some twenty kilometres off, here the staffs of the Anglo-French forces work unceasingly, sending regiment after regiment to the battle-field. On every side groups of soldiers and officers are to be seen. All the public build-

ings have become barracks. In all the wide streets artillery trains pass in long procession.

But to me this does not constitute the essential activity of the town. For all France is working, from the Pyrenees to the Vosges. In Lorraine there is something over and above industry, something we find in the least wealthy and active populations.

This morning, before we came to Bar-le-Duc, we halted at Domrémy. This visit had only a pious end in view. What we wanted to see was not the poor village which, as the guide-books say, "is of very little interest," but the hovel in which Joan of Arc was born. After doing homage at the narrow window through which the voices of the mystic forest penetrated to the heart of the Maid, after bowing with religious reverence before the gentle image of the inspired peasant-girl, after breathing the rustic aroma of the Chenu wood, which intoxicated that ardent and ingenuous soul, my companions wished to continue our journey without even taking a walk through the village streets. I persuaded them to be a little more leisurely, and to inspect the village, so that we might talk with some of the inhabitants. I do not know what were their impressions of the two hours we spent thus ;

but, for my part, I must say that I had as great a surprise at the heroine's cradle as at the warrior's tomb in Bar-le-Duc. What might be but a sanctuary of the past is actually a living well-spring of the future. With what faith, with what enthusiasm, with what confidence the Lorrains grouped about the mystic dwelling lead their terrible existence of to-day. Joan is no motionless saint upon her stone pedestal to them. She is a living example, a perpetual counsellor, a source of consolation. Her compatriots hear again the voices she heard four centuries ago. "There is great misery in the Kingdom of France," she said to the neighbouring forest. "There is great misery," replied the echo. And just as of old she gave her arm, so her great-grand-daughters give the flesh of their flesh and the soul of their soul.

"There is not a young man left in the place," an old woman tells us.

Husbands, brothers, sons, all who can still shoulder a rifle went off the first day of the war. Many will never come back, and yet there are no sad faces, no traces of tears, no agonized silence. All Domrémy quivers with the same enthusiasm, with the moral force that makes a people immortal.

But you must not suppose that in Lorraine great sentiments are expressed in great attitudes. No, indeed. In normal times I have only passed through to go from Metz to Strasburg, but it seems to me impossible that there could be anywhere more perfect simplicity. The people speak smilingly of the drama that is enacted before them, with a frankness that implies constancy in their consciousness.

“Death,” they seem to say, “is nothing.”

Is this suggestive of cemeteries? . . . In these death is everything. Elsewhere I have seen towns which *are* cemeteries, towns which drag on their existence beneath cypresses, as if upon the stones of tombs, insensible to the splendid pulsations of life. I have seen towns buried, as it were, beneath the weight of their memories and lacking the vitality necessary to expose their relics to the perils of action. Who has not seen them? In the East, under the rays of a sun which should be a focus of feverish energy, fine races once adventurous, sleep their eternal sleep, swathed in brilliant cerements.

Here, on the contrary, where the days are short, where mists veil the horizon, where eyes are pale, life seethes hotly in the veins, and the will is tense as a strung bow.

Exaltation in harmony and hope in sacrifice : this is what I saw in Lorraine.

From Bar-le-Duc, which we have barely seen, we go to Commercy, by the road formerly taken by good King Stanislas of Poland, who tried to console himself for his exile by organizing processions worthy of *Le Roi Soleil*. The landscape has retained the stately elegance of bygone days, and many of the groves profusely scattered over the plains, have such an air of nobility and such a harmonious grace that they look like parks, more suited to gallant promenading than to the rough task of the woodcutter. Woodcutters, indeed, can hardly exist here save in fairy tales. Like their Gaulish ancestors, the Lorrains worship trees, and if they no longer deck them with coloured ribbons as in the days of Joan of Arc, they protect them as far as possible from the fury of the axe. Lately, when it was said that the staff thought of setting fire to the forest of Saint-Mihiel to dislodge the Germans, the whole population was depressed, in spite of their ardent patriotism. And more than once, in the course of our present pilgrimage, I have noted the consternation with which the country-folk contemplate the corpses of great poplars struck down by shells on the road side. "A god lives in the trunk of

every oak," said the first colonists of Gaul. Even now it is not rare to find in the hollows of ancient bark an image of Saint Nicholas or of the Virgin Mary. But the ladies of the Court of King Stanislas, whose palace we have just seen rising above the woods of Commercy, declared it was Cupid who was hiding in the forests.

It was a strange Court that gathered round the obese monarch, who, after having followed the blood-thirsty Charles XII of Sweden in the whirlwind of the Polish wars, succeeded in marrying his daughter to the wily Louis XV. Born at Lemberg, and elected King of Lorraine at the Congress of Vienna, he might have attempted to concentrate the influences of the North in his kingdom. But Voltaire kissed his hand, and the Marquise de Boufflers his lips, and forthwith his barbarous soul was a captive in the golden cage of French grace.

The palace, which we now examine with the curiosity of tourists, retains something of the threatening solidity of a mediæval fortress. It looks as if it had been built rather to defend the valleys around it than to lodge a suite of periwigged lords, and ladies dressed à la Pompadour. When the sovereign first saw its walls and towers, he was still a Pole. When he arranged the interior,

reserving the best apartments for the philosophers and ladies of Versailles, his transformation was already accomplished. I look upon him, indeed, as a symbol of the history of Lorraine, in which we always find the conquering strength of Germany vanquished by the smile of France. Like Stanislas, and before Stanislas, other princes came from the North, determined never to lay aside their steel armour, but after a time they felt that they must of necessity adopt French elegance.* Even at the present moment, in spite of German pride, the part of Lorraine which has belonged to the Empire since 1870 offers an interesting study to the observer. From Metz to Boulay and from Boulay to Thionville, not a single Germanic idea has been able to take root. It is certain that after the war, when the captive province shall have returned to the Motherland, it will not seem more foreign than any other part of the national heritage. Down towards the East, in the recovered portion of old Alsace, schoolmasters sent from Paris have to teach their

* Monsieur d'Audriffet, Louis XIV's envoy to Duke Leopold, writes as follows to his sovereign of the Court of Lorraine: "All hearts here are very German." Leopold was born at Innsbrück, and had been the pupil of the German Jesuit Creitzen. Every one knows, however, what a thorough Lorrain and Frenchman the good duke became later.

language anew to the children of Thann. In Lorraine, French has never been forgotten. If Alsace is a filter, into which the two hostile races pour their distinctive cultures and intermingle them, Lorraine is a battle-field where the two opposing ideals are ever warring, and where France, victor or vanquished, invariably achieves the supremacy of hers.

Commercy, melancholy and deserted in normal times, is extraordinarily animated thanks to the war. This is not only due to the troops who pass through on their way to the Argonne or Verdun, singing their stirring military songs. The animation that astonishes us is apparent among the civilians, in the shops, among the labourers, among all those who have lived for half a century in expectation of the new act of the drama, and who are quivering at the roar of cannon close by.

“Ah!” cried an old seller of post-cards, “I should not like to have died without seeing what is happening. . . .”

His eyes sparkle under his thick eyebrows, and his wrinkled face expresses a quiet and patient determination. Without forgetting, for a moment, he has waited for forty-four years. His hair has become white, and deep wrinkles have furrowed his forehead. But the blue flame that

burns in his eyes suffices to show that his soul has remained unchanged since 1870.

There is not a single Lorrain, child, woman, or old man, who has any doubts as to the ultimate victory.

At Raon-l'Étape, to which we go on after a few hours at Commercy, the spectacle of faith, energy, and confidence is more moving than anywhere else. Raon-l'Étape is one of the towns in the East which suffered most from the invasion. The Germans remained there for nineteen days.

“It was in the early days of the war, when we had only the ordinary garrison here,” Dr. R—told us. “One night, the 25th of August, to be precise, the entire division of the famous General Deimling attacked our scanty garrison, which soon succumbed to numbers. The soldiers who survived were taken prisoners to Germany, and the enemy's troops entered the town, marching with parade step, as arrogant as if they had conquered the whole French army. The General made his way to the Town Hall, and as he did not encounter the Mayor, he sent for two notable citizens, Messrs. Raoul and Guimet, to tell them that he should hold them responsible for public order. Then he ordered them to lodge the officers in the best houses and to

prepare provisions for the soldiers. 'In the name of His Majesty,' he cried, 'I take possession of Raon-l'Étape.' Our inhabitants resigned themselves to their fate, and showed the most perfect calm. Any attempt to defend themselves against 2000 or 3000 armed men would have been madness. Those who had guns or revolvers went and deposited them at the Hôtel-de-Ville, and our prison-life began. For the first few days all we had to complain of was the insolence of the officers. Clicking their spurs and clanking their swords, they walked about the streets with the airs of desperadoes. The little boys laughed at them a bit, and the better class people pretended not to see them. At the end of a week the German ladies began to arrive in their turn. The captains and lieutenants had sent for their wives to be present at their triumph and take part in it. We all imagined that this would soften the manners of the invaders, and that the officers would not walk about so much. The very opposite happened. The houses which so far had suffered chiefly in their cellars were now obliged to open their wardrobes. The German ladies wanted French costumes and French hats, and if the whole business had not been so odious, the sight of these female captains and lieutenants

dressed up in everything they could lay hands on, and rejoicing in the most fantastic combinations of colour, would have amused us. I remember one stout Teuton, fair and imposing, who had put on a dress belonging to my wife, and who went about half-suffocated, asking where she could get some Parisian corsets. When evening came, the chiefs gave receptions, to which all these ladies crowded, dressed as if for a fancy ball. We laughed at them, hoping this state of things would not last long. And, in fact, the comedy was changed to tragedy one fine day. On the pretext that the inhabitants of a certain quarter had attacked the soldiers, the burning of houses began, systematically and methodically. The first day they set fire to some dozen houses with petroleum a colonel requisitioned in our shops. On the following day a notice was issued by the Kommandatur warning the inhabitants that the whole town would be destroyed should the smallest violence be offered to His Majesty's troops. That same evening the Lecuve factory was set on fire, no one knew why. The owner, to whom the General had given his word that no violence should be committed, presented himself before the Commandant, and in energetic terms, complained of the vandalism of his troops.

‘You can shoot me,’ he said, ‘but no one can make me hold my tongue as long as I have a breath of life left in me.’ The German began to laugh, and replied that it was not worth while to make such a fuss. ‘Have a glass,’ he added, pointing to a bottle of champagne. The Commandant was drunk, and happily he was jovial in his cups. The Germans played a gruesome trick on another of our compatriots which ought to be recorded. The victim was M. Ferry, a rich and greatly respected municipal councillor. His son had been killed in the defence of the town, and the ladies of the Red Cross had had him buried. One night M. Ferry heard a knock at the door. He went to the window, and saw a French soldier lying on the pavement. He took a lamp, and went out into the street, and what do you think he found?—The corpse of his son. . . . After the first fire there were others. You will see the town. . . . Every two or three days the flames broke out somewhere. . . . It was a nightmare. . . . And meanwhile the masquerade went on ; the ladies continued to dress themselves up in French costumes, the officers to hold receptions. . . . Ah ! . . . At last, one night, the cannon began to make their liberating voices heard. How pleasant the roar was to our ears !

The furious General told the Mayor that he would give orders to destroy the entire town at the first shell that fell upon his troops. Happily, he had not time to do this. As soon as the French troops appeared on the south, the Germans took flight towards the north. The ladies, with their hats and dresses, were the last to go. . . . The husbands left first."

We found that Dr. R— had not exaggerated when he described the destruction by fire. As soon as we began to walk about the streets, we found ourselves confronted by the eternal spectacle of ruins, always the same kind of ruins, ruins monotonous in their frequency. The inhabitants talked of 136 houses that had been burnt. There is not an uninjured building left in the Rue Jules-Ferry, in the Rue de la Gare and the Rue Jacques Melez. The market, the schools, the post office, the principal church, the Vilgrain mills, the great factories, all that was the pride of this rich, industrious town has disappeared in the flames.

And when we passed out of the town, the other unfailing spectacle presented itself in the outskirts of the villages, in the farms, in the orchards, in the gardens: that of crosses marking the place of graves, poor graves crowned by red képis and

ornamented with little tricoloured flags. Now and again there was a grave with a larger cross wreathed with flowers.

"There," we were told, "lies a civilian who was shot."

Here rest the poor municipal officers who were unable to collect the sum requisitioned by the Germans; here the Mayor of Allermont, here the Mayor of Vexaincourt, here the parish priest of Luvigny and Abbé Mathieu.

"Here I ought to be myself," cried Dr. R—who was threatened several times because of his zeal in tending the French wounded.

And he added :

"At the time I shouldn't have cared. . . . Now I am glad to be still alive. . . . It would have been too wretched to have died doubtful of victory. . . . And there were such dark days, when we were waiting and nothing came. . . . But we have assurances at last that we need not despair. . . . In Lorraine we have been hoping among the graves for forty-four years."

The American journalist seated on my right in the motor that is taking us to the Argonne, speaks with astonishment of the activity of the French. To him the open shops in villages almost within gun-range, and the smoke rising from factory

chimneys are extraordinary sights. But what surprises him most is the quiet work of the peasants in plains traversed but yesterday by the enemy, and perhaps destined to be trodden by them again.

“The Germans are still at Saint-Mihiel on the banks of the Meuse,” he says, “and yet look at the calmness with which those people are sowing, never asking who will reap.”

The workers who bend over the kindly earth are old men, children, and women. The oxen open the furrows slowly. Shepherds are pasturing their flocks on the slopes of the hills.

There is a Virgilian peace in the landscape, and war seems so remote that by degrees it begins to fade from our minds. The canal from the Marne to the Rhine stretches in a long straight line to our right, reflecting the gilded trees of the wayside in its quiet waters. Everything is golden, a dry reddish gold; the soil, the sky, the tops of the oak-trees. It is a picture of exquisite grace, with something solemn floating in the chill air. Effort is everywhere apparent, but not anguish. The work we are watching has a ritual air, as the old sowers pass slowly making their rhythmic gesture. A free and humble life vibrates over the fecund soil. In the distance the peals of

village church bells float so lightly in the air that sometimes we are uncertain whether the sounds that reach us come from these, or from the sheep-bells of a grazing flock.

My friend becomes silent, gazing at the landscape, and I feel that he is thinking of the happiness of this existence, and that vague thoughts of going no farther, of stopping here and tasting this sweet serenity, are floating through his mind.

But suddenly, as we emerge from a little wood, the scene changes, and we awake. Alas ! peace and sweetness and idyllic poetry have disappeared. Grim tragedy confronts us.

“Sermaize,” says our guide.

“Three months ago,” he explains to us, “Sermaize was one of the most fashionable watering-places in Lorraine ; its population in summer was almost as large as that of Vittel. It had comfortable hotels, elegant restaurants, and luxurious shops. Its wide streets were as animated during the season as those of the Pyrenean spas. Ladies came thither from every part of Europe to take the waters. Its châteaux draped with Virginian creeper were grouped along the canal, forming picturesque quarters. See what remains of it now. . . .”

In the centre of an open space, a stone fountain rises intact. This is the only structure the German shells have spared. All the rest is simply a collection of ruins. The roofs were destroyed by fire, and the walls were dismantled by bombs. Messina must have looked like this after the earthquake. There is not a single uninjured wall, not a door still in place.

And yet the town has not the sinister aspect that was so heartrending at Clermont-en-Argonne, at Aube, and at Courtacon. Children play among the ruins, climbing upon the fragmentary walls, playing at battles, shedding the unconscious smile of the future over what should speak only of the past. And it is not only children who animate the scene ; men and women assemble in the open spaces and talk vivaciously.

“ Let us go up to one of these groups and hear what they are saying about their misfortunes,” says our captain.

We approach and listen. But they are not discussing their miseries, nor the dark past, nor the burnt houses ; the morrow is their theme. Meeting in conclave, the Sermaizians, heedless of the cannon still roaring on the north, consider how they may best rebuild their ruined dwellings. One of them addressing us, murmurs : “ You see

all this desolation ! ” and then at once, forswearing vain lamentations, he confides to us his faith in the resurrection of the watering-place. Next summer, “after the victory” the visitors must be able to come as usual. There is a tranquil light in their eyes. Their faces are not drawn or convulsed. With a moral strength at once touching and inspiring, they all bow to the irremediable, and prepare to create a new life upon the dead life. The oldest are the most energetic. With their horny workworn hands they point out the spots of greatest interest to them : the quarter of hotels and springs, the centre of vital force in the locality.

“When the lads come back from the war,” cries one of them, “they must have somewhere to lay their heads. They will have a right to a little peace and affection ! ”

The young girls of the place, who lack the brilliant beauty of southern maidens, but who are very attractive, with their mischievous eyes and expressive mouths, smile when they hear talk of the lads who will come back. Not one of them seems to have the slightest fear as she evokes the image of her betrothed. They wait, impassible, with that confidence in God which Joan of Arc carried to the pitch of divine madness.

They will all come back, and everything will rise again from the ashes, they seem to say, as they wave their handkerchiefs at us in farewell, seeing us deeply moved.

Indeed, in a population like that of Lorraine nothing dies irrevocably. What Barrès takes for a beautiful graveyard is, on the contrary, a marvellous centre of life. No region in the world has suffered more through the ages from fire and sword. Her plains have been a perpetual battle-field for all the races of Europe. There has never been an emperor, a king, or a prince, who, at the zenith of his glory, has not coveted her lands. The Romans passed here, and after them the Barbarians. The Carlovingian dynasties were formed here. Here Charles the Bald, the rival of Louis the German, was crowned. Here the Hungarians celebrated their abominable night. Here the Normans horrified Christendom by their cruelties. Here Gisleber was vanquished by the Germans who seized his duchy. Here there have been episcopal sovereigns, heretic sovereigns, miserable sovereigns, captive sovereigns, martyr sovereigns. . . . The struggle between France and Germany, which is now dyeing the soil with blood, is but a continuation of the formidable age-long *mêlée* in which an Otho, a Conrad, a Henry,

a Louis, a Charles, a Napoleon, a William took part. Passing from hand to hand, and ever blood-stained, it might be supposed that Lorraine was created by Providence to be the eternal victim of greed and rapine. Her hills and valleys contain more tombs than flowers. And yet she is not a cemetery, for cemeteries are made for rest, and what vibrates here is life, life so rooted in the sacred soil that even death cannot prevail against it.

THE BATTLE-FIELD OF VERDUN

December 20.

FROM the window of my room I see something on the river bank that is like a Flemish engraving, at once gently melancholy and prettily infantile. At the foot of a bridge blackened by time stretches a row of dark, narrow, pointed houses, looking as if they had been painted by a child on brown paper. They are all alike, they all lean over slightly they all have the same little low doors, and they all seem ready to collapse at the first gust of wind. Yet they have all been there from time immemorial, and in their little rooms the descendants of the conquerors of Charles V live their quiet lives, listening to the carillon that wakes me this morning, as it woke good citizens before the Treaty of Westphalia. This fortress, surrounded by cannon, has always been a very peaceful city. Of old, when the Spanish Emperor and the French King fought for its possession, the chroniclers called it "one of the Three Bishoprics." And even to-day it still wears an episcopal and conventual air, of which neither the roar of the batteries nor the fever of combat

has robbed it. Shells are bursting a few kilometres off. From the Place d'Armes regiments start daily for the front. The motor-cars of the Staff pass rapidly along its avenues, carrying generals to Thavannes, Charny, and Donaumont. Officers are talking of gallant deeds in the military club. But in the midst of all this the population continues to live quietly and silently, as if nothing had changed within its walls. And as if to make the contrast more glaring, these people, whose history has been a perpetual tragedy throughout the ages, appear to think nothing so important as the famous sweetmeats sold in their shops. Goethe, in his notes on the campaign in France, confesses that when he entered Verdun after the terrible bombardment, the thing that most interested his greedy German soul was the confectionery.

“Our first care,” he wrote on September 3, “was to visit the admirable confectionery shops ; the while we enjoyed the good things we bought here in profusion, we thought of the loved ones we had left at home. The courtesy of certain couriers enabled us to send some of these dainties to our friends, to show them that we are in a country where there is never any lack of wit and sweetmeats.”

If in those cruel days when the invader was actually treading its soil, the town wore this aspect to one who had just arrived in it, you may imagine how it appeared to us, now that the Germans have bombarded and occupied it only in the telegrams of the Wolff agency. At every street corner a venerable sign calls attention to some speciality in sweetmeats. Like Goethe, we go into the most famous shop, and between two mouthfuls we too think of distant friends who may at this moment be reading some Berlin *communiqué* announcing that the fortresses around us are continuing to fall under the fire of the terrible 42 mm. guns. The only rather depressing thing is the age and appearance of the ladies who serve us, and who look as if they had escaped from some Flemish Béguinage. How much sweeter these dainties would seem offered by young hands and with the supplementary honey of a smile! But at Verdun all the women are old. This statement will, I know, evoke memories of the English journalist, who on landing at Boulogne and seeing a young girl with bright red hair, wrote in his notebook: "All the women of Boulogne are red-haired." But there is no one here, from the most frivolous lieutenant to the most grizzled colonel, who does not complain of

the lack of pretty girls. This is a speciality of the town, as characteristic as the sweetmeats. Is it because, in her desire for harmony, the local genius will tolerate only nobly veiled, discreetly silent, elegantly distrustful ladies in this monastic atmosphere ? . . . Or because mothers, fearing the seductions of the military, keep their daughters behind the grey walls of their houses ? In the aristocratic quarter, beyond the crenulated Port de la Chaussée, there are patrician mansions with mysterious jealousies ; and at the foot at the cathedral, under the music of the carillon, which from hour to hour pours out its changeless rhythm of ancient bells, certain little flower-decked balconies suggest nocturnal interviews after the Spanish fashion. But in the streets in broad daylight there are no provocative glances, no rosy lips, no coquettish figures. . . . Yet what does this matter after all, in a place where we have come to seek cannon, trenches, and fortresses ?

The personage who receives us is not a mayor as in the other towns, but a general. A fine snowy beard enframes his still youthful face. He looks straight at us with keen clear eyes.

Captain Vallote presents us, not by our names, but by those of the countries we represent :

“Switzerland, Holland, Denmark, Norway, United States, Italy, Spain.”

“I,” exclaimed the general laughing, “am a native of Carcassonne.”

And no doubt because Carcassonne is a little bit Spanish, he turns to me. Our captain speaks again, very impressively :

“General Sarraill,” he says, “will do you the honour of accompanying you in person to visit the forts and the trenches.”

General Sarraill ! . . . One of the most illustrious of the French leaders, the general who commanded the Third Army last September and gained a magnificent victory over the Prince Imperial.

He is the most amiable, the most genial of men.

Chatting familiarly, he walks with us to the quay, where the motor-cars are waiting ; he has a pleasant word for each of us.

“I will not offer you my limousine,” he says, looking at our open cars, “because you would not see the landscape from it. Besides, it’s not very cold to-day.”

Then, gaily :

“The Germans declare that they have occupied some of our fortresses. . . . We will see if you

can discover any of them, for in spite of my good eyesight, I have not been able to do so, so far. . . . We will go to the most advanced point of our fortifications. . . .”

During our drive my Danish colleague does not allow me to contemplate the ravaged and tragic landscape we are traversing in peace. He, who has just returned from Germany, is amazed at the idea that a general in the army should take the trouble to accompany us and should treat us familiarly. The German officers are so different ! A simple captain at Strasburg or Metz considers himself a superior being when he speaks to a miserable civilian.

“Charming !” he exclaims every minute, “charming ! What a charming people !” And what astonishes and delights him most is the prospect of getting into a fortress in war-time, a few yards from the enemy. In Germany, according to him, anyone who ventured to approach a frontier citadel would immediately be shot.

As we get further from the town, by the banks of the Meuse, the landscape stretches away in ample monotonous undulations, dominated by low hills, treeless and lifeless. According to the Staff map, there must be some famous forts to our left. Our eyes, however, can distinguish

nothing. Just as before the plains of Châlons, we feel a kind of irritation at the thought that here, quite near us, there are thousands of men and several hundred guns, and that we cannot see them. Like the poet inspired by the wall "behind which something was happening," we must be content to believe that the batteries lie hidden among the sparse bramble-brakes of the north. At regular intervals on each side of the road, wires disappear into the bushes, their grey network melting into the uniform colour of the soil. And this is all. . . .

In about twenty minutes our caravan halts at a solitary place.

"We can't go any further in the cars," says the general. "This is the last fort of the fortress."

When we examine the ground carefully, we discover on the left a low door, from which several artillery officers come out to meet us.

"You see," says Sarraill, "there are no Germans here."

What we see is the fort ; or rather we are looking at it and we don't see it. The romantic notion of a fort with towers, walls, moats, and crenelations has nothing in common with the modern reality. Personally, I knew that in these

days the most important thing is to hide the places whence the firing comes, so of course I did not expect to see a mediæval castle. But what I saw was so strange in its nudity that I had great difficulty in persuading myself that I was actually on the scene of war. There is not a muzzle of a gun to be seen anywhere. Behind the entrance door stretches a kind of sandy *dune* covered with a harsh and scanty vegetation. Then the eternal arid undulations begin, the eternal wires, the eternal solitude.

Leaving our cars on the road, we follow a narrow path on foot, and arrive at a little wood a few kilometres off.

"If the day were clearer," says one of the officers who had joined our group, "we could see the German lines from here on this side, towards Cuisy, west of Forges. . . . Forges is the thicket there in front . . . about 1000 metres off. . . . Our trenches are there."

A slight mist hung over the horizon, and in spite of our efforts to discover something with the help of our field-glasses, we saw only an empty landscape. General Sarrail smiled at our baffled curiosity, and I know not why, but I seemed to read in his smile a certain melancholy, as if it were irksome to him to conduct operations

of this kind, an occult subterranean conflict, instead of commanding splendid cavalry charges, mounted on a gallant horse. The plain that opened before us seemed, indeed, to invite to less covert action. Between the woods of Cheppy where the Germans were entrenched, and the banks of the river, whole armies might manœuvre in open country, fighting for the possession of the coveted town which lies there quietly in the background.

But we see nothing at all. A few steps from our little leafless copse, the earth is covered with funnel-shaped holes formed by bursting shells. Further on there are a certain number of rustic crosses. On a little knoll three large black poplars lie on the ground as if struck down by a thunder-bolt. These are obvious signs that we are in the last line of fire and that the artillery sends its famous shells as far as here.

The American asked what was the path which traversed the country in front of us.

"It is our last line of trenches," answered an officer. "From where we stand we could talk to the soldiers if we raised our voices."

So there were soldiers there; this was the point where the fighting begins. . . . And we civilians could see nothing but the black ribbon

of the trench, which looked to us like a lonely footpath.

What an extraordinary thing is scientific warfare ! One sees neither men nor guns. A telephone wire unites the observers in their holes a few paces from the foe, to the batteries of the fortress. And yet men are dying in these trenches, which have already become a vast common grave ; men are killing from their hiding-places ; they are fighting without moving, without seeing or recognizing each other. . . . Only yesterday a blockhouse constructed by the Germans quite near here, where 200 soldiers were sleeping, was destroyed by a 120 mm. shell and converted into a tomb. To-day the French have occupied this ruin, and to-night they will sleep in it after repairing the roof, not certain that a shell may not cause them in their turn to awake in another world.

“ Could we not go nearer to the trenches ? ”

“ No,” replied the general, “ impossible. . . . We cannot go beyond this point in daylight. . . . This little wood conceals us ; but if we ventured out of cover, the German batteries would come into play. . . . They killed one of my horses quite close to this a short time ago. . . . The slightest movement in broad daylight provokes a

shower of projectiles. . . . Our enemies don't spare their shells. . . ."

At the moment not even a rifle-shot was to be heard. A silence as of death lay over the whole landscape, and even the branches of the trees about us seemed deliberately to abstain from the slightest movement. Far, far away in the mist a black speck was moving in the sky. We thought it was perhaps an aeroplane. An artilleryman observed it for a moment, and at once shook his head disdainfully. It was less than nothing. This dread word was constantly to be heard: nothing.

No, there was nothing; nothing stirred, nothing quivered.

Even the most serious of our company, those who do think that life was not meant to be uselessly exposed, felt a kind of hankering after danger. To be in what is called the theatre of war, within range of the guns, to be almost able to talk to those who are fighting, to know that close at hand there have been scenes of atrocious agony, and yet to have seen nothing of the great drama, is really disappointing. We were all silent, seeking in space a salient point, a striking object. We were all evoking the battle-pieces of bygone days, the Van der Meulens, Vernets, and

Delacroix, the scenes that still stand for battle in our imaginations. And we all looked at each other with a kind of curiosity, as if interrogating one another.

The general who, no doubt, divined our inward disillusionment, said to us :

“The important thing was that you should know that the enemy is not close upon Verdun, as he pretends in his *communiqués*. . . . In some places, here, just opposite, our soldiers are only about fifty yards from the Germans. . . . Every day we advance a little. . . . But it is slow, very slow work. . . . This war is unlike any other war. . . . It is siege warfare in the open.”

Then looking at his watch :

“It is late already,” he cried, “we must go. We are some way from our motor-cars.”

Thus, without having heard a shot or seen a cannon, we return from our visit to a battle-field.

On the way Sarrail describes the magnificent engagement in which his troops defeated the Crown Prince in September.

“My army,” he said, “at first took part in the great frontier-battles ; but it was obliged to retire, following the general movement of the French forces, to secure a base in this fortress

against the attacks of the enemy. At present my numbers are equal to those opposed to us, but this was not the case at the beginning of the war, and I had to plan the action with a force greatly inferior to that of the Crown Prince. About September 10 my positions were determined; I had Bar-le-Duc on my left and Verdun on my right. The Crown Prince's flank was therefore threatened, and he tried to make a way for himself by the fort of Troyon, calculating that the taking of Saint-Mihiel would enable one of his corps to invest this fortress. When I grasped the enemy's intentions, I sent my cavalry along on that side, and I managed to contain the movement by which I was threatened. The German corps opposed to me were the 3rd, 10th, and 16th, supported by the 13th Württemberg Corps and two reserve divisions. These were admirable troops, most admirably commanded, I am bound to admit. . . . But ours succeeded in stopping them, and in dashing their hopes of getting to Verdun. Accordingly, as I was sure of not being attacked, and above all, sure that they would not be able to besiege these forts, in spite of all their efforts, I began quietly to prepare my offensive. The most important thing was not to lose touch with

the rest of the army. And I never did. . . . No. . . . Even in the hardest moments of the battle, when my regiments began to take part in it, we were always in touch with the other French groups operating on the banks of the Marne. I at once strained every nerve to keep the space round Verdun clear, so that the famous siege-guns should not get within range of my fortresses. The result of our offensive was greater even than the most optimistic had hoped. Although they fought stubbornly for every foot of ground, the enemy gradually fell back, and my cavalry pursued them. . . . If you could have seen those battle-fields ! . . . They were covered, literally covered with corpses ! ”

Sarrail stopped and pointed southward, over the town, to the vast plains of his triumph, between the woods of the Argonne and of Souilly. His clear eyes seemed to be piercing the mist and gazing at the terrible picture he had seen four months ago. His firm, expressive lips murmured words which did not reach our ears, and in which I liked to think there was something like a prayer for the heroes who had gone in obedience to his voice to fall yonder, on the green banks of the Meuse.

The general turned to us, and said, showing

us the line of green hills that bound the horizon on the south-east :

“ Now we must drive them out of there. . . . Saint-Mihiel.”

And after a moment's silence he added :

“ If it were not for the Forest of Apremont ! . . . I did once think of burning it. . . . But it is not easy in the winter, when the trees are wet.”

There was another silence. Finally, smiling again, his face illuminated by the radiance of hope, he concluded :

“ But the day will come.”

Some of my colleagues, who could not believe that a great battle could be described in so few words, and were waiting for the continuation of the story of the September operations, began to question the general, but the only answer they received was a very amiable and very categorical “ That's all.” That was indeed all. . . . Hundreds of men fighting, killing, and dying . . . towns disappearing in flames . . . troops retiring and other troops pursuing them. . . . Then a plain covered with corpses which the crows devour. . . . That is all. From the beginning of the ages it has always been thus, and thus it will doubtless be to the end of the world.

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A deep disappointment weighs upon us, nevertheless. Walking behind the distinguished soldier who is silent, we think of the details of the great tragedy, and gradually we realize the infinite anguish of the unknown. How many heroic deeds must have been done during the battle ! What sublime sacrifices, what valour are implicit in such a conflict ! Formerly, when a battle-field could be shown in an engraving, the more brilliant exploits stood out in relief. But now generals can only see operations as a whole, enormous masses and great movements. And when they want to identify the places where they were victors or vanquished, they have to bend over a map to contemplate spaces that human sight is incapable of embracing.

When we returned to the door of the mysterious fortress where we had left our motor-cars, we found it thronged with soldiers. It was the hour of rest after luncheon. Like children in the courtyard of a school, the good troopers play, talk, and laugh, while the officers discuss the news just received in newspapers from Paris. At the sight of the general all stand at attention for a moment, and salute.

“ Good morning, my children,” says Sarraill.

Then addressing a fair-haired bearded captain,

who stands motionless like a bronze statue, he cries :

“A fine beard ! But look out, or you will be taken for a German. . . .”

The soldiers smile.

A horseman passes at a gallop, and seeing his famous chief he stops to salute.

“The devil !” says Sarraill, looking keenly at the horse. “Wherever did you get that beautiful animal ? You would make a sensation in the Bois de Boulogne.”

My Danish companion, highly delighted, was taking in this scene, which seemed to him extraordinary. His northern mind finds it difficult to conceive the idea of so much familiarity and so much gaiety in the midst of tragedy, of so much good humour and so much courtesy in the very battle-field.

“In Germany,” he murmurs in my ear, “this kind of thing would be impossible, for the subordinates would at once lose all respect for their chiefs.”

Here respect is found to be perfectly compatible with democracy, and a gesture is enough to make the most factious of *pious-pious* obedient heart and soul to the orders of his commander.

Sarraill is an exception, say his admirers.

But this is hardly true. Sarrail, with his fine courtesy and his greatness of soul, is merely a perfect personification of the typical French soldier. In our recent visits to various headquarters we met many other generals, and they all impressed us in the same manner by their amiable simplicity. We saw Marjoulet, grave, ceremonious, and as distinguished in manner on a terrace bristling with guns as in a Parisian *salon* ; we saw Palacot, very close to the enemy in a patrician mansion, where he might have been entertaining us for some festivity ; we saw the famous Micheler among the bushes of a wood, living like a primitive warrior, a bearded paladin, who when he speaks to his men seems like a patriarch in the midst of his tribe ; finally, we saw Gérard, the soldier-philosopher, a dreamer absorbed in transcendental problems. . . . And in all these, at all times, we found an exquisite grace and an admirable sense of justice, in spite of the herculean labours with which they are overwhelmed.

“ Ah ! the rascals ! but they are fine soldiers ! ” cried an old colonel, speaking of the enemies he was fighting like a lion in the depths of the forest of the Argonne.

And this phrase, translated into more refined

terms, and adorned with a little more rhetoric, was now to be found on the lips of Sarraïl, just as we had found it on the lips of Marjoulet, Palacot, and Gérard. It is another form of Bayard's phrase, when he speaks of our "gentle enemies," the Spaniards; of the Comte d'Auteroche's phrase, when in the thick of the fight he raised his hat and saluted his English foe; of Murat's phrase, when he acclaimed the heroism of the Russians. It is the phrase which has ennobled the soldiers of France throughout the centuries. And more than ever in these days when coarseness and brutality seem to have taken possession of the warrior's soul, when war is a formidable mathematical process, when nothing of the poetry of the old-world battle-field has survived, such martial grace surprises and delights us, a last vestige of the epic graces of yore.

"*Bon voyage*, gentlemen, and carry away a pleasant memory of our peaceful Verdun," said Sarraïl, bidding us farewell. "If my business did not stand in the way, I should have much pleasure in accompanying you to the heights of the Meuse, which are more picturesque than the fields we have just visited."

Our motor-cars rolled slowly away, finding a passage with difficulty between the innumerable

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vehicles of the transport service that thronged the road. Scarcely had we left the southern forts behind us and approached the Regret Woods, when the aspect of nature changed as if by enchantment. How well we understood this name, Regret, when we imagined the grief the Prussians must have felt in 1792 on abandoning the vineyards they had loved so much, after their defeat at Valmy. Rivulets run in every direction, forming a capricious damascening of silver on the enamel of the flowery meadows. The villages hide their thatched roofs under planes and lindens as if they feared, that seeing them so happy, the enemy's cannon would be eager to destroy them. Here and there a mill spreads its white wings in the midst of huge haystacks that look like Esquimaux huts. Idyllic pathways lose themselves among the trees, inviting us to give up our hurried excursions and go to dream peacefully on the brink of some limpid spring. The war-zone seems to be very remote. And yet here is a signpost which forces us to think once more of the terrible realities of the moment : Metz, 49 kilometres. In three-quarters of an hour we might be there ! . . . So near and yet so far ! . . . Our captain smiled bitterly when I jestingly asked him if we were going to

take the road indicated by the arrow on the sign.

France has been looking for half a century at this tempting and ironical arrow, which is repeated the whole way from Paris to Longeville, all along the road. Near here, if we continued in this direction we should come to Étain ; a little further on is Conflans, and then the old walls appear, still grey, still proudly bearing their blackened coat-of-arms, and bathed by the waters of the Moselle. But is there anything which is not unaltered in the captive city ? Other towns, weeping as she weeps, have not had strength enough to resist the cajoleries of the seducer, and have accepted the gewgaws that have transformed them. Look at the new quarters of Strasburg, and you will behold a German image, strong, bright, rich, and heavy. Metz, on the other hand, retains her ancient aspect with despairing love, preserving even her defects and blemishes rather than lose her character and her individuality.

“ I wept with rage to feel myself more of a foreigner in this city, which is ours, than in Paris itself,” wrote a German professor at Metz a short time ago. The French weep also, not with rage but with emotion at the fidelity with

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which this fair city of Lorraine, violated by the conquerors, keeps the faith she promised in the dark sublime days when the Emperor Charles V in vain aspired to take possession of her.

Before the arrow on the signpost, the words of Barrès, speaking on behalf of his compatriots, come back to me: "A day will come when amidst the trampled vines, upon the devastated roads and over the scattered ruins we shall go to implore thy pardon, and rebuild thee with gold and marble. Oh! what festival shall we then hold! what a huge pilgrimage of all France there will be, hastening to touch the fetters of the captive."

I can almost imagine that the arrow is growing longer, that it is stretching out farther and farther to the point it indicates.

"Shall we go there, captain?" I asked our guide again.

"Yes, we shall go," he answered gravely.

AN ARTILLERY FIGHT IN THE ARGONNE

December 25.

THE morning is clear, a northern winter's morning, cold and damp, with broad beams of sunlight passing through riven clouds to light up the tree-tops after the fashion of reflectors. The north wind brings strange exhalations of rotting leaves from the depths of the forest. Flocks of crows, satisfied with their feast, disport themselves in the air, seeking the bands of sunlight to bathe themselves in them.

We all feel animated and talkative.

"Have you been here long?" some one asks our guide, an infantry officer.

"Over three months," he replies.

And without any further questioning he gives us his recollections of the great battle, in which he led a company.

"When I arrived on August 23," he said, "our troops were retreating, fighting during the day and falling back at night. My first impression was not very agreeable, as you may suppose. We had scarcely taken up our position at Montfaucon, when we were attacked by forces

so greatly superior in numbers that we never thought we should get out alive. . . . And the most terrible part of it was that when we got away, we were surrounded by troops which poured out of the woods. Our colonel, feeling that it was all up with us, had an idea which seemed pure madness, but which proved our salvation ; instead of pushing on to the south, he led us on to the assault of a village occupied by the Germans, where we were able to join up with another regiment coming from the east. For two days we attacked without yielding an inch of ground, fighting with the bayonet. I had been suffering from rheumatism, but it was cured there and then. When we came out of our village to continue our retreat, Major C. had to meet a terrible counter-attack by a whole brigade of the Prussian Guard, which was waiting for us in the neighbourhood. Seeing the enormous mass in front of us, he said to me : ‘ It’s all over with us, my boy ! ’ What a fellow he is ! Very short, hot-tempered, foul-mouthed, always storming against something. It is only when he is fighting that he is good-humoured, and then he laughs and jokes like a child. ‘ We must die, brothers ! ’ he called out to us. Rifle in hand, at the head of the column, he fired away

like the devil, and after each shot he declared he had killed a general. Suddenly a bullet broke his left arm. I wanted to bandage it with a handkerchief, but he would not let me. 'Another general!' he cried, leaning against a tree to fire. At that moment a fragment of shell tore out one of his eyes. Then, superb and terrible, his face bathed in blood, he continued to advance like a ghost. We all followed him. 'Forward, brothers!' he cried, 'forward.' It was suicidal. However, we got to a farm in spite of the Prussians, and in this farm we found one of our batteries that had been lost the evening before. We held our ground there for a whole week, until September 6, when we received reinforcements. . . . Then the luck began to turn, and it was the Germans who had to retreat."

"And the major?" we asked.

"He is still in this wood, one-eyed and furious. If you meet him, don't be frightened by his rudeness. He is a badly brought-up child . . . a mere child."

We had penetrated into the old heart of the forest by the defile of Les Islettes. All around us were great trees, black and leafless. Our motors advanced slowly on the muddy road. When we met an ammunition-wagon coming in

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the opposite direction we were obliged to stop to let it pass. The wheels sank in, and the steps of our cars brushed the trunks of the oaks. Yet for centuries past formidable armies have passed this way. Condé brought his cannon along here ; here those who were fighting against the power of Charles V made their way to the Low Countries ; and hither came Goethe in the Duke of Weimar's carriage, to behold the defeat of Valmy.

"It is the Thermopylæ of France," say the historians.

To-day this Thermopylæ has become a bloody labyrinth, in which men hunt each other like wild beasts, pursuing each other through the thickets. In certain places such as La Grurie and La Chalade, the French and German trenches are only some twenty paces apart, and dying men can look at each other, asking perhaps what supreme reason there was for the bitter pass to which they have come. . . . For the fierce hatred breathed by the newspapers of Berlin and Paris is by no means conspicuous on the battle-field. The enemy is the enemy, no doubt. He must be destroyed. But not insulted. A Reservist said to us this evening, speaking of the Germans, whose graves are to be found at every step in the neighbourhood :

“Poor devils! They too must have left sons and fathers and wives and mothers behind.”

In the forest density, the human soul seems to feel the mournfulness of fate more acutely than in the open plain. When the Roman legions were in these same places, they had a strange terror of the unknown. True, in those days the terrible gods the Gauls called Vosago and Caturix were hidden here. But even without its formidable deities, the Argonne is one of those spots where the unfathomable misery of existence is borne in upon one most strongly. To die under these oaks, far from all that makes up the joy of life, must be more painful than to die in the open country. There is an element of shipwreck in the catastrophes we picture to ourselves.

The dry branches murmur like the sea, and the thickets seem deep as abysses. The wolves which inhabit the forest in normal times have fled, howling, at the roar of the guns. Only men remain, transformed into wild beasts, pursuing each other from bush to bush, without even the excuse of hunger or hatred.

The officer who takes us to his batteries at the Four-de-Paris is a Territorial who, in times of peace, is the manager of one of the branches

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of the Crédit Lyonnais. Everything about him is gentle, quiet, and *bourgeois*. His moustache is already white, and he needs spectacles to see properly.

“Follow me,” he says, “and try not to tear yourselves on the brambles.”

When we have taken a few steps, he stops and cries :

“Here they are !”

Here they are, indeed, stretched out upon their gun-carriages with gaping jaws, like savage beasts watching for their prey, silent and motionless.

There are eight of them. Some, long, grey, and slender, have a something feline and serpentine about them. Others are short and sturdy. The last, which are hidden under a bed of leaves, strike terror by their immense size. Beside each of them, a motionless man holds a cord, with which he seems to be controlling the animal in his charge.

The officer makes a sign.

Then they all begin to roar, mingling their monstrous voices and vibrating in a violent convulsion.

The whole forest trembles.

Do you remember the famous chapter in which Goethe speaks of “the fever of the cannon.”

"I seemed," said the poet, "to be in a very hot place, and the heat was burning me so that I felt my body to be at the same temperature as the element in which I was. In this state, the sight is not dimmed ; but the world seems to have been suddenly dyed a deep red. Far from noting any acceleration in the circulation of my blood, I had a feeling that my whole being was melting in the furnace around me ; and this explains the term cannon-fever. It is worthy of remark that the most horrible elements in the situation of which I am speaking reach us through our ears, to wit : the cracking, whistling, roaring, and howling of the cannon-balls."

These lines were written more than a century ago in these same Argonne regions, after Goethe had been allowed to approach a battery. I was now in the midst of several batteries, and it was in vain that I tried to feel the famous "cannon-fever." Neither in myself and my companions, nor in the soldiers who pulled the ropes to hurl 75, 120 and 155 mm. shells did I note the slightest trace of nervous perturbation. We listened to volleys of thunderbolts ; the air seemed to crackle ; there was a long-drawn creaking of branches, and when the projectiles were lost in space, the only recoil we noted was that of

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the guns. The 75 mm., light and slender, recoils on its breech without any effort, and returns at once to its original position, as easily as a Browning pocket-pistol. The 120 mm. runs, jumps, shakes itself, trembles for a second and then settles down again, as if satisfied with its gallant deed. The 155 mm. heaves under its roof of dry branches, and seems to growl in the depths of its tortuous soul. But the gunners, tranquil as if they were upon a polygon, do not even move. Is this because war has so completely lost the character of a formidable element of poetry, that cannon too have become entirely prosaic? Those of other days, as we see them in forsaken fortresses and in historic trophies, were gilded and polished; their shapes were harmonious, and their bronze bodies were adorned with agreeable blazons and noble inscriptions. Their voices roared like thunder, and their dragon-jaws belched forth flames. Those of to-day are dry, smooth, and grey; they bear neither ornament, nor cipher, nor device; they have no names even, and instead of lording it in martial pride on the hill-tops, they lurk in trenches, or under a layer of dead leaves, like subterranean monsters. But what I find most disappointing about them, now that I see them

at close quarters, is the meanness of their voices. In what we still romantically call "the thunder of the cannon," one thing is very evident, and that is, that there is no thunder about it. It is a brief shock, like something breaking, a simple crash, or at most a howl of rage, short and sharp, in which we note that in the acceleration of battery fire, there is no time for the old epic concerts that produced the "cannon-fever."

Fever! We had only to look at the officer who received us to understand what scientific calm, what methodical tranquillity are necessary in directing the algebraic operation of a modern battle. After each volley, a lieutenant comes out of a hole and says to his chief :

"Fifty metres north," or "fifty metres west."

The commandant of the batteries gives the order, addressing himself to the pointer :

"Ten minutes."

And with a turn of the wheel of some mechanism of the breech, the fire which had fallen short or gone beyond the mark before, now reaches the desired point, as if a mysterious hand had guided it through space.

After three volleys, the officer in the hole, who

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is in telephonic communication with another observer hidden in another hole a few paces from the enemy, cries :

“ Right ! ”

Then the chief calls out :

“ Fire ! ”

The guns begin the bombardment ; the air trembles ; the shells fly with a fluttering as of sinister wings. Over there, some three kilometres off, trenches are being blown up, villages are burning, men are falling, torn limb from limb. And the good citizen, who, in his normal life as a bank-manager, would feel sick if he saw one of his clerks crush a finger in closing a safe, presides here, impassible as some savage god over invisible hecatombs.

“ You come from Paris ? ” he asks. “ Now that the theatres have opened again life must be pleasanter there. I have been here in the Argonne for three months. I left a wife and family at home.”

His eyes, which never flinch at the sight of death, are dimmed for a moment behind his spectacles. His family . . . Paris . . . the pleasant life of the bureaucrat ! . . . And he must go on firing, killing, living out his obscure and heroic tragedy in the woods, caked in blood

and mud ! And this will have to go on perhaps for months and months !

“ This is the most difficult point of the battle,” adds the officer. “ We gain ground painfully, foot by foot, without knowing when we shall succeed in clearing the whole forest. During this last week, in spite of the liveliness with which we have been bombarding one another, we have remained almost stationary. On the 7th, in the wood of La Grurie, we mined the enemy’s trenches and advanced a little. On the 8th, to the west of Perthes, we also blew up some German trenches and progressed a little. On the 9th, the Germans tried in vain to regain the ground they had lost on the preceding days. On the 10th, a German officer got here, trying to locate our batteries. I shot him dead. He fell just there. Then, as a precautionary measure, we changed our emplacement and went northwards, returning here on the 11th. On the 11th, I thought my cannon would be done for ; shells were hailing on us all the morning. But two gunners were killed and a horse was wounded, nothing more. At La Grurie the enemy attacked again without any result. On the 12th, a black day for us, the Prussians mined our trenches at La Haute-Chevauchée and blew

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them up. From the 13th to the 14th we progressed all along the line, gaining some 200 metres ; on the whole things are going well, very well. . . . We are holding them, but it is a long business. . . . In the present war. . . .”

The officer did not finish his sentence. A German shell fell some fifty paces from us. We did not see it. We did not even see the flash of its explosion among the trees, and the sound of it was drowned in the roar of the French cannon. But the artilleryman, accustomed to distinguish his projectiles from those of the enemy, begged us to go.

“The fire is regulated every 50 metres,” he said, “and in an instant this spot may be covered with *marmites*. You must not stay here, gentlemen.”

Then making a sign to his gunners he ordered them to cease firing.

“They are getting the range,” he mutters. “We must not help them. They shan’t hear anything for a few minutes. Then I will pay them out by giving them a turn with the 75 mm. I have down there in the background.”

Suddenly another shell fell on the same spot, and this time we heard it burst as if it had been at our feet ; nay, more : we could distinguish

between the projectile that was fired on our side and that which had come from the enemy. What a rending and tearing in the air ! Everything around creaked and vibrated. And afterwards, like an echo of the catastrophe, enormous branches fell groaning to the ground.

“Gentlemen, I cannot allow you to stay a minute longer.”

The gunners, standing quietly beside their pieces, watched our departure, apparently unconscious of the terrible sadness of this brief scene. We were going away to avoid the danger of an hour at this post. But they had to stay there not for an hour, not for a day, but to the end, which might be death. And they did not even ask themselves the reason why. They did not complain of the difference of our fates. There they were and there they had to remain ; there the hand of destiny had placed them, and there the fire of heaven would find them, quiet and resigned. I waved my hand to them in farewell, and they answered by a smile. I saw them through the trees for a few minutes in the distance. Nothing was stirring in the woods. A strange smell rose from the damp earth as the dead leaves rustled gently to the ground. As we reached the road we heard another shell fall

where the two others had fallen. And I thought again of those we had left behind, feeling sad and almost ashamed not to have stayed with them myself.

We clasped the officer's hand in farewell and our cars rolled off in the mud. Right and left of us was the forest, which looks so virginal and has been so often violated. After a while we came back to the high road and to the graves, the innumerable graves that make sublime Appian Ways of the humblest paths.

The captain, our guide, continued the morning's conversation as if nothing had happened in the tragic interval of the past hours, remarking :

“It was a great pity we didn't meet Major C. He would have given us some picturesque details of the latest battles. . . . He is down there, one-eyed and furious. . . .”

GERMAN PRISONERS

December 29.

“**Y**OU wanted to see some German prisoners ? ” said General Sarrail, showing us a group of soldiers advancing on the path some 500 feet away. Here are some.”

We all took our field-glasses.

Some fair-haired soldiers were marching stiffly along under the escort of a French patrol.

“Are these the first to-day ? ” asked the general.

“Yes, General,” replied a captain.

Every day, it seems, the French outposts capture hostile pickets who have ventured too far from their trenches.

“At the beginning of the war,” said the captain, “they fought like lions and preferred death to capture, because they believed we should shoot them. The chiefs told them so that they might not be tempted to desert. But now they know that there is no danger of this, and as soon as they see our soldiers they throw down their rifles and hold up their hands. The Poles more especially seem on the look-out for an opportunity

of falling into our hands. Yesterday some Reservists from Posen began to sing the 'Marseillaise' when they got to our trenches, and laid down their arms, full of joy. Look at these, and you will see that they don't look frightened."

The group halted near us ; a French sergeant came forward and saluted the general.

" We surprised them in the fields getting wood," he said.

" Did they defend themselves ? "

" The man with the beard took his gun, but seeing that the rest did not follow his example, he let it fall on the ground again. They are Reservists."

The bearded man was a German, with an energetic face and red hair ; he was handsome and serious. The stripe on the collar of his grey overcoat showed that he was a non-commissioned officer. His companions looked at him with respect. When the general questioned him, he answered :

" *Sous-officier . . . sergent . . . Saxon.*"

This is all the French he knows and he brings it out with quiet pride.

The others were private soldiers, pale, thin, and exhausted. Their uniforms were covered with mud, torn, and faded, showing that they had been long in the field. Not one of them

trembled. With lips compressed and hands on the seams of their trousers they remained motionless, waiting for their fate to be decided. One of our company, the editor of the *Journal de Genève*, spoke to them in German, without getting the slightest reply. The only one who spoke was the man with the beard, who remained the leader and superior even in disaster.

“My men,” he exclaimed.

Then he added that they had been told off to go and fetch wood from the forest, and that they were aware of the risk they were running, having seen the French patrols near here.

Absolute calm reigned on every face. The sergeant in particular behaved in the presence of his enemies just as he must have behaved the day before in that of his superiors.

This tranquillity, confidence, I might almost say joy, made me think of the first convoy of prisoners I had seen four months ago at Orleans. The plains of Louvain were then illuminating what is called the theatre of war, and details of the atrocities committed were passing from mouth to mouth throughout the world. All the talk was of mutilations, tortures, shootings, and cruelties. As a retort to those who spoke of the martyrs of Liège, the Chancellor von

Bethmann-Hollweg accused the Belgians and their Allies of gouging out the eyes of wounded Germans. A veil of blood hung over the great tragedy, hiding the heroic deeds and leaving only the savage scenes in evidence. The Germans, misled by their officers, believed that the French shot all their prisoners mercilessly.

Those I saw were shut up in one of the waiting-rooms of Les Aubrais station. When the army doctor who was accompanying me opened the door they all got up, and in the strong summer light we saw their livid faces, their drawn lips and anxious eyes. It was a terrible and pitiable sight. In one corner a fair-haired boy was holding a cup filled with coffee in his hand, and his arm trembled so that the coffee was falling drop by drop at his feet quite unnoticed by him. Another youth, very thin and ragged, seemed to be muttering something like a prayer, and every moment he pressed his hand to his heart with a kind of automatic gesture. But the group, sustained in the midst of its great moral wretchedness by its sense of military dignity, showed admirable strength of mind. Even the youngest, beardless boys, hardly more than children, made a super-human effort to brace themselves against the

illusory danger that threatened them and to control their instinctive terror.

“Where do you come from?” asked the French doctor in German.

A sergeant stepped forward, saluted and answered :

“From Guise.”

“Have you all you want?”

The sergeant made a gesture of indifference, as if to say that to men in their desperate case the small comforts of life had no importance. The others, overawed by the four gold stripes of my companion, did not dare to speak. One of them, however, made signs that he wanted to say something.

“I should like to write to my mother before I die.”

To die! That was the fixed idea. When the French soldiers came in bringing soup, coffee, and water for them, the first thing they asked was always:

“*Kaput?*”

Kaput in the mouth of a German soldier is the most ferocious of threats, the saddest of obsessions.

“*Kaput!*” they cry when they enter a village and want to terrorize the inhabitants.

“*Kaput?*” they ask anxiously when they are made prisoners.

The doctor began to laugh, and addressing them all in a loud voice, he explained that the French never kill their prisoners, but that on the contrary, they nurse them if they are wounded, and feed and lodge them well if they are able-bodied.

“Have you anything to complain of so far?”

“No—not so far—but . . .”

It was impossible to satisfy them altogether. Their officers had assured them that the French shot all their prisoners, and they could not doubt the word of their superiors.

“And in Germany,” said the doctor, out of patience at last at this humiliating stubbornness, “do you shoot all prisoners?”

“No . . . not there . . . it’s different there. . . .”

A flash of pride gleamed in the green eyes of the sergeant, revealing something of the monstrous arrogance of the race. Undoubtedly to this man, as to the professors at Berlin, the Germans are a chosen people, a people of superior culture.

“They are all the same,” concluded the doctor, an Alsatian who had studied in Strasburg.

Taking a card from his pocket he wrote these words in a fine Gothic character :

“ You have nothing to fear ; you will be treated with humanity ; your life is sacred to the French nation.”

When the sergeant read this his face lighted up. The letter-card was passed from hand to hand and wrought the same miracle of resurrection in every soul.

“ Not *kaput* . . . not *kaput* . . .” the more ingenuous among them kept on repeating.

To-day, happily, no German soldier who falls into the hands of the enemy fears the ten bullets of the dreaded picket. The letters the Geneva Red Cross Society undertakes to transmit to German homes carry reassuring news. “ We are well, we are well treated and well fed,” they declare. The question of food is the first thought of these naturally gluttonous men. The French smile at the voracious appetite with which even the most aristocratic-looking officers attack succulent soups and generous portions of boiled beef. “ The only quarrels we heard of in the camps,” writes a certain Captain de Cholet, “ arose from thefts of dainties.” With this exception, no complaints are made as a rule against these poor soldiers, who, when once they are disarmed, become as gentle and submissive as lambs. “ Save that they are no longer at liberty,”

adds the captain, "the German prisoners lead a life similar to that they lead in their own garrisons in peace times. They are commanded by their own sergeants, who maintain discipline and apportion the work to be done. Very often I see them seated on the ground peeling potatoes and carrots for the *pot-au-feu*, and the only thing about them that strikes me disagreeably is the entire absence of those jokes with which our French troopers season their monotonous tasks. They are slow and silent, and seem like great children, a little irresponsible even. They get the same rations as our soldiers: soup and stew with bread and water, copious but coarse nourishment, which they seem to find most appetizing. Those who are weak get some wine, and it is amusing to see the envious eyes of the rest, and the stratagems they devise in order to share this great favour."

But if the soldier is a somewhat irresponsible child, the officer, on the contrary, is a terrestrial demi-god, terribly conscious of his superiority, or rather of his *superhumanity*. We have all noticed at the railway stations, when trains have come in with prisoners, the icy, ferocious arrogance that obtains in the first-class carriages. From the humblest lieutenant just turned out

of the Military School to the general whose hair shows white beneath his helmet, one and all are faithful to their pose of supreme ironic disdain. Even the wounded, in the midst of pain and fever, retain enough energy to repulse indignantly any civilities which French courtesy would show them.

In Cæsar's *Commentaries* there is a famous portrait of the German warrior as he was in his primitive barbarism. "Ariovistus," said the conqueror of the Gauls, "exercised his military power harshly, demanding the children of the great nobles as hostages, and submitting them to all sorts of torture when the vanquished did not prove sufficiently docile. He was a violent, arrogant, and cruel man." Even after his defeat, indeed, the terrible warrior had nothing but insults and sarcasms for Cæsar and for Rome. And as was this first foe of Latin culture, this barbarian who would not recognize the superiority of his conquerors, or believe in his irreparable overthrow, so also is his descendant in the twentieth century. The skins with which he covered his body have disappeared. He uses cannon instead of arrows. To give himself an air of refinement he wears a single eye-glass. But at bottom he is still the same, full of insolent

pride and incurable savagery. For him his soldiers are a troop of slaves. More than once in the early days of the war, when the camps were not yet properly organized, it was necessary to shut men and officers up together. To the French officers, who fraternize with their troopers, this did not seem a very serious matter. The German officers went so far as to threaten to commit suicide if they were not separated from the common soldiers. In a hospital at Toulouse a short time ago a severely wounded officer of the Prussian Guard noticed that a corporal of his company lay dying in the adjoining bed. "Take that fellow away from here," he exclaimed. The Red Cross nurse in charge of the ward protested energetically, invoking the principles of equality and humanity. "Very well," replied the captain, "if he is not to go, I will." And he tore off the bandages from his wounded head, hoping thus to kill himself. "We had to put him into a strait-waistcoat to nurse him," said the doctor, who was present at the scene. There is, in fact, a kind of mania, a mania at once detestable and admirable, in the pride of the German officer. The Reservists in the ranks who have been made prisoners lately, confess that the army has already lost its pristine glamour for them,

but the officers of every grade continue to swear that they are confident of final victory. One of them declared in October that his regiment was in Paris, and it was useless to read him the Berlin telegrams admitting the defeat on the Marne; he was not to be convinced of his error. One day an English colonel gave him his word of honour that he was not being deceived, and that the German troops had retreated to the Belgian frontier. "The English have no honour," was his reply. Anti-British feeling is an article of national faith with them. They allow that the French possess courage, loyalty, nobility, and above all, a martial spirit. In the presence of a French officer a German officer thinks himself before an equal, almost a "Kamerad." The memory of the age-long struggles in which he has crossed swords with his eternal foe forces him to give him the respect due to his caste. But the subjects of King George with their mercenary troops fill him with scorn. The English army is, as the Kaiser declared, "contemptible." And it is quite useless to argue with those who think thus. The prophetic General von Bernhardt and the humblest German sergeant are at one on this point to-day as they were yesterday: "There are only two real armies

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in Europe to-day : the German army and the French army." And of course they add : "The German army is superior both in strength and perfection."

This cast of mind, with its mixture of greatness and pettiness, is more manifest in the captive officers than in those who are still fighting. Disaster and humiliation, instead of producing disillusionment, inspirit them. It would be childish to attempt to surprise the secret of the German soul through them. Taking refuge as a rule in haughty silence, they hope or fear without betraying their inmost thoughts. The men in the ranks, more especially the Reservists, are simpler, franker, and more natural. Those we now had before us talked readily enough. The first thing we noticed in them was their surprise or rather their surprises. Turning over the leaves of the note-book written by the sergeant, by no means an uneducated man, we saw how he had been obsessed by the great illusion which had made them believe themselves invincible in the early days. The editor of the *Journal de Genève* read aloud, translating from the German :

"A French motor-car has come into Germany carrying a billion francs for Russia and our chiefs

know where it will be stopped. The news from Paris is good; the Socialists have taken the President of the Republic prisoner and have burnt all the churches and barracks. The population is looking for our advent to save them from the horrors of the Commune.

“The English will support the Germans on the sea if the port of Antwerp is ceded to them.

“I was present on August 22, 23, and 24 at the Battle of Longwy-Longuyon and Saint-Laurent, where the 5th and 6th Corps were opposed to our troops under Prince Eitel-Friedrich. Our batteries are composed of six guns and they fire in salvoes of three. The 75 mm. guns are the devil.

“We have nothing to drink but very bad water, and provisions are scarce. Our comrades who got into France through Belgium with the help of the Belgian troops, are better off, for they are now at the gates of Paris, and have wine and food in abundance. Yesterday we burnt a village and I found a brass box with a few coins in it at a farm.

“We cannot find out whether our troops are in Paris, or whether, as the peasants here tell us, our armies had to retreat after the Battle of the Marne. We have had no news for a fortnight,

that is from September 14, and our chiefs tell us nothing. The only thing that is certain is that we are not advancing, and that we are surrounded by forest on every hand. The food is bad and is always badly cooked, because the cooks of the company care for nobody but the officers. The thing that had been hidden from us was that the English were against us. Whose fault is all this? I don't know, perhaps everybody's. If not? . . . *Ueberhaupt Niemand.*

“We have been sleeping in the open for five nights, and the weather is cold and rainy. It is wretched! We make no progress, and it is said that the Russians have taken Budapest, and that things are going very badly in the North. The chiefs look angry and the men are weary, and have neither strength, material, nor *moral*. We are told that it is the English who won't make peace; our Emperor and the President of the Republic wish for it to avert greater disasters. The trenches are full of water. Yesterday I sent home a little metal box and other ornaments I took from a house we burned, and the uniform of a dead French officer. My family will be pleased. I wrote that we were at Verdun, because we had been told so, but it seems that we are still a long way off. The Bavarians are more

disagreeable than ever now they see that things are going badly, and they gird at us as Prussians. We cannot say anything because our colonel is a Bavarian. To-day we took the priest and the mayor of a village prisoners, to see if the inhabitants would give up the cattle they have concealed from us rather than run the risk of being shot. On the whole things are going badly, and on the whole also the news we get makes us fear that we shall not get back to Germany safe and sound. I haven't a single coin left of those I took out of the money-box. All this is bad, bad."

Such was the last page of the diary, which was dated November 30. General Sarraill smiled as he listened and murmured softly :

"This man doesn't know that his ingenuous confession of the theft of the money-box would entitle us to send him to a court-martial for trial. But they are all the same. They seem to think there is no harm in looting."

Then turning to the prisoners, he exclaimed :

"Very well, now you can say that you are in the fortress of Verdun and it will be quite true !"

The sergeant saluted, stiff and serious, unconscious of the irony. His companions continued to stare with frightened blue eyes at our group.

What seemed even more extraordinary to them than their own situation, no doubt, was to see a general smiling and talking familiarly with the soldiers of the escort. What a strange people they must think these French, whose guns are "the devil" and whose warriors are not heartless automata.

IN THE TRENCHES

January 3, 1915.

SCARCELY had we penetrated into the vast hole which serves as an ante-room to the trenches of the first line, when a soldier, a regular "bearded pard" (*poilu*), intercepted me with open arms, crying :

"You here !"

I looked hard at him, seeking in vain for some feature that would help me to identify him under his tangled mane. His mud-stained peaked cap came down over his eyes, and a ragged comforter came up to his mouth, which was smiling rapturously.

"Ch—" he himself at last said.

Ch— ! I could scarcely believe it ! Ch— the deputy, the exquisite writer !

"We are all like this now," he said, noting my astonishment.

And throwing back his *képi*, he let me see his clear, gentle eyes, in which gleams of irony and tenderness still lurk timidly.

"What would your constituents say if they could see you now ?" I asked.

"My constituents ! Why, they are all here

with me! The whole district is at the war. Since chance has brought you into our trench, I will be your cicerone, if my lieutenant will allow me. . . . This way . . . this way. . . . Stoop, and try not to slip."

We were walking in a very long ditch which connects the trenches. At regular distances a sentry came out to meet us from behind a bomb-proof screen and seemed quite stupefied to find himself confronted by a civilian. The lieutenant made a sign and our slow and cautious advance in the mud was continued. There was something distinctly comic in our mole-like progress. But the idea that I was going at last to find myself in the first line of battle, on the very spot where men were killing and dying, moved me profoundly. Through the passage in the earth the wounded were passing every moment. . . . I fancied I could see traces of blood in the red clay. . . . This was the spot the range of which the enemy were continually trying to get in order to shower shell upon it.

Soon, turning a sharp angle, we found ourselves in a lair some twenty yards long by two deep, in which a few soldiers were quietly finishing a meal. The lieutenant took me to one of the extremities whence I could see that the ditch

was continued behind a bomb-proof screen, and that there were more soldiers in the adjoining trench.

“These screens,” explained Ch—, “divide the trenches at intervals, so that if a shell were to burst here, for instance, it would only kill the men on this side.”

“Thank you,” cried one of the soldiers with a laugh.

As the lieutenant who accompanied me had warned me not to raise my head when we were in front of the loopholes, I continued to stoop, without daring to look and see what was going on in the field of battle. It was not for want of curiosity. What, I wondered, could there be in that tragic space which the soldiers were contesting with such fury? . . . The eyes of the whole world are fixed upon this spot, where the formidable play of destiny is preparing a new Europe, perhaps a new Humanity. . . . And I was in that hole, and if I had liked I might have seen everything, but such was my respect for orders that I dared not.

But what was happening? One of the soldiers stood up on the ledge, raised the upper part of his body out of the trench, and quietly began to clean his bowl. Another followed his example;

then another and another. Only Ch—, the lieutenant and I kept in the bottom of the trench, not venturing to mount on the ledge.

“May I see what is happening outside?” I asked.

“There is nothing,” replied the officer. “At this hour there is always absolute calm. . . . As far as I am concerned I should say that you might look out, but you know the colonel’s orders were very strict. . . .”

I got up, accordingly, quivering with expectation, and with my field-glasses I looked for the enemy’s trenches, which are some eighty yards from us. All I could see, very much nearer to us, was a Prussian helmet and a grey overcoat lying at the foot of a stack of straw.

“It’s a dead man, a sentry,” muttered the soldier, washing out his bowl with the utmost nonchalance.

And indeed I made out, between the helmet and the stack, a white patch which must have been the face, and lower down, two patches which were the hands, standing out strangely distinct upon the black earth. . . .

“Why don’t they pick him up?” I asked.

“The dead are only brought in at night,” said another.

Then he added :

“That one fell this morning . . . about two hours ago. The sergeant shot him. Instead of concealing himself behind the straw, he was going and coming as if he were looking for something. . . .”

The poor dead body was the only thing in all the bare grey plain that made one think of life. A cruel anguish seized my heart ; I know not if it was because of the man stretched there some thirty paces from us, or because of the indifference of the men at my side ; but what is certain is that my ideas of morality are in process of dissolution. What is dying, what is killing, what is all which in normal times seems to us most grave and terrible ? . . . Nothing ! . . . That German was still alive this morning. . . . These Frenchmen are living now, and this evening, God knows. . . . The sergeant who killed the man is there, talking to Ch—.

This is war.

Yes, no doubt ; but I had a different idea of war, a somewhat foolish, legendary idea, full of noise, splendour, movement, and great heroic deeds. And when I saw what war in the trenches really is, its caution, its silence, its indifference to life and death, I felt utterly disconcerted.

The lieutenant described his life to me, how he is always in hiding, how monotonous it is. In the beginning, especially, they could neither eat nor sleep. But gradually the adversaries agreed upon little periodical truces, none the less efficacious because they are neither signed nor sealed. In the meal-times, for instance, it is understood that no one is to fire. Convoys pass within a hundred paces of the rifles, the sentries come out of their holes, and platoons go to fetch water at the springs. A captain might seize his enemy's dug-out without much difficulty on one of these occasions. But no one would dare to commit such a felony. And this is not for lack of good-will, for it often happens at the front that one side has plenty, while the other is famishing. The Germans are worse off than the French in this respect. One has only to read the little notebooks of the prisoners to understand how the Kaiser's army is obsessed by the lack of provisions.

"It is now two days since we have had anything hot, and life is unbearable to us," they write from every quarter. On the other hand, when they can get a good meal of sausages and potatoes, they are almost happy. An officer who had spent a month in Flanders near the inundated territory told us an amusing story in this connexion.

One morning a Bavarian soldier who had come out of his hole in search of some beetroot left in a field by labourers, mistook his path and wandered into the enemy's lines. The troopers caught him by the feet and brought him into the dug-out of the captain of the company, who asked him :

“ What are you doing here ? ”

“ I was looking for something to eat,” said the German.

“ It isn't the dinner hour.”

“ I know, but we have had nothing for two days.”

The captain ordered a sumptuous meal for him : meat, eggs, sardines, cheese, coffee, cognac, and even a penny cigar. When the feast was finished, the captain cried :

“ And now be off, we have had enough of you.”

“ Oh ! ” said the poor fellow, thinking of the abundant menu of the French trenches, “ I consider myself your prisoner.”

“ No, no, we can't be bothered with one single Boche. Be off. Later on, if we catch you with all your companions, we will keep you. . . . We have enough provisions here for a regiment. . . . Good-bye ! ”

At nightfall twenty soldiers to whom the honest Bavarian had described his adventure, came over and gave themselves up in the trench of the sardines and cheese. As a recompense they were given a splendid dish of fried potatoes.

"Fried potatoes," said Ch—, "are our favourite dish, and the cook is esteemed or detested according as he prepares them well or ill. When we see him coming along there from the south with his saucepans, the first thing we ask is whether he has brought us our favourite dish. The worst of it is that generally he won't take the trouble to cook them to a turn, and so when they get here they are uneatable. Only yesterday we held a court-martial on the cook of our trench, and we condemned him to be degraded for not doing potatoes properly. If they are not good to-day we will condemn him to death."

Everybody laughed. We were in a trench occupied by loquacious, greedy, and boastful Southerners. One of them offered to go and get the dead Prussian's helmet.

"We bet you won't!" cried two or three of his comrades laughing.

"I won't? Well, you'll see. . . ."

And with one bound he was on the edge of the trench, with all his body out of cover.

“Gently!” ordered the lieutenant. “You know quite well this is the hour when they never shoot.”

We were, it seemed, enjoying a complete armistice. Behind some dry bramble-bushes about fifty yards away from us, there was a vague and confused movement of grey shadows. The bare plain, which Ch— compared to the plateaux of Castille, seemed to be animated by a mysterious subterranean life. From time to time in the bewildering labyrinth of trenches a red *képi* appeared, a bayonet gleamed, an empty tin hurtled through the air. . . . Until two o'clock anyone who chooses may show himself with impunity and raise his head and shoulders above the parapet.

“When the enemy's trenches are nearer, as they are over there, towards the west, among the bushes,” said the lieutenant, “it is not very rare to see a German approach the edge of the ditch to ask for a match or a little tobacco. Our men return the visit on similar errands. And when by chance there is some one on this side who can speak German, or some one on that side who can speak French, these colloquies sometimes take quite an amicable turn. A short time ago the relations between the two trenches had become

so cordial that a Prussian captain asked to have his men transferred. Before going away the Germans warned our men to look out for those who were to replace them, because they were Silesians from the Russian frontier, who did not understand 'French customs.' In a general way the German soldiers have a rather diabolical idea of our troops. It is extraordinary what one has to do to gain their confidence. To all the ironical advances made to them they answer: 'We don't believe you.' But when once they are convinced of our good faith, they are like children, full of curiosity and eagerness. . . . We, for our part, detest the German officers, because they are cruel and haughty; but not the poor troopers, who are heroic and intelligent at bottom, though they don't seem so."

General von Kluck says with some pride that since the war broke out the French have been learning the great military virtues from the Germans. It is true that, sorely tried by their futile valour of the first days, the Republican troops no longer hurl themselves on the enemy in wild bayonet charges to the sound of the trumpet, and that they fight patiently and tenaciously, having made up their minds not to lavish their heroism unnecessarily. On the other

hand, the Imperialists have caught something of the spontaneity and ready wit of their adversaries by daily contact with the enemy's trenches.

"If they did not spend their lives trembling at their officers," said a Parisian *piou-piou* lately, "the poor Boches would be gayer."

Certainly not one of them ventures to show the slightest spontaneity in the presence of the captains with the single eye-glasses. But it is a very different matter when you meet them alone with their sergeants. The first thing they want is to speak to the French, to hear their voices, to see their faces, and to this end they establish, by means of interpreters, veritable conferences in which they lay the foundations of a kind of armed fraternity. The French translate the Parisian papers to them. When the Germans hear of reverses they become serious and silent. But those who have spent some time in the regions of the Aisne, end by learning to laugh even in the most anxious moments. Fair France, heroic, volatile, gentle, and elegant, gives them the lesson they need.

"Their soldiers," said Ch— to me, "learn to laugh, to show some initiative, not to live like automata. . . . Sometimes they prove so jovial and so brave that they make us all respect

them. . . . But this does not apply to the officers. No, indeed ! . . . They are impenetrable. They neither hear nor see nor understand. With a pride forged by Krupp they live and die without ever experiencing the immense delight of communing with themselves, alone, and of listening to the voices of their own souls. . . . This is why we are so much more amiable to the non-commissioned prisoners than to the officers. We treat the officers strictly according to the regulations, whereas we receive the privates as cordially as we can. . . . And the soldiers know it ; they are grateful to us and they say so. A few days ago, near Saint-Mihiel, where the trenches are only about twenty yards apart, our men were indignant at the brutality with which a Prussian lieutenant treated his men. Every minute his strident voice was heard heaping abuse on some one. Some Parisians determined to avenge their adversaries by killing this lieutenant without harming the soldiers. One night they wrote on a little piece of paper : ‘To-morrow at four o’clock in the afternoon, don’t put out your heads whatever you hear, let your lieutenant find out for himself what is happening.’ On the following day at the appointed hour, the best marksmen in our trench took their rifles,

while the Parisians acted the scene they had arranged beforehand.

“ ‘The general ! ’ cried one.

“ ‘Yes, so it is,’ exclaimed another.

“ ‘Here he is on horseback,’ they all shouted together. “Long live the general ! . . .’

“The German lieutenant put out his head to see what was happening, and two bullets wounded him mortally.

“ ‘He won’t harass you any more with his insolence,’ said the Frenchmen to their neighbours.

“And a frank, guttural voice replied :

“ ‘Thank you.’ ”

Every one was glad. There are other times when every one is grieved, as for instance when some soldier who has distinguished himself by his bravery falls in an attack. Then friends and foes combine to do honour to his memory in the plaintive and touching fashion of the countryside. More than once we saw in the fields of the Marne a bunch of wild flowers laid at the foot of a German grave ; and the prayers of two nations mingle over the graves of good officers and brave soldiers.

“Poor devil ! ” said one of the Southerners, looking at the corpse of the sentry ; “if the

crows come to pick out his eyes, we will scare them away with a shot or two."

"Poor devil! . . ." This is the great funeral oration of the battle-field.

Last Sunday, very early in the morning, a French observer who was in an outpost thirty yards from the enemy, noticed an unusual commotion in the opposite trench. There were not twenty Germans there as usual, but a hundred, perhaps more. They were all talking at once, all using the same words and all apparently motionless. Full of curiosity, the observer risked taking a few steps in advance, and crawling along in the mud to a point whence he could see perfectly what was happening in the mysterious trench. A Protestant minister was standing reading prayers, and a compact group around him, composed chiefly of officers, was repeating the sacred words in fervent tones.

"You shall see how our guns serve at Mass!" thought the Frenchman, returning to his lair, whence he telephoned to the distant batteries what was going on. There was a minute's silence. Presently a vigorous voice said in the observer's ear :

"The captain won't let us interrupt the

Boches' Mass. When they have finished their prayers, call again."

A quarter of an hour later, when the service was over, a salvo of shells fell on the trench. Then the Frenchman, who was looking on well pleased at the hecatomb, saw something that appalled him. From the middle of the shattered corpses the minister, one arm torn off at the shoulder, his face lacerated by shot, put his head out of the trench, and turning to the enemy's lines, cried out :

" May Christ forgive you ! "

Then, sinking back on the bloody mass, he lay motionless for ever.

" Poor devil ! " said the gunner who told this story, " I see him still with his ghastly face."

Ch—, much touched, told me of the fraternal spirit that reigns among his comrades.

Everything good, noble, generous, and heroic in the French soul has been brought out, he declared.

Leaning on the parapet of the trench, my friend, the trooper-deputy, gazed long at the desolate plain that stretches away indefinitely, without a wood, without a village, without a trace of life or joy. We were in the sinister Champs Catalauniques, a few kilometres from

Auterive, in the most solitary part of the country.

“Dreary place !” muttered a soldier.

But Ch— replied :

“It has a mysterious beauty, like the plains of Castille, and surely no place in the world offers a more fitting grave. In some of the landscapes of the Île-de-France, which look like the background of an eclogue, the thought of death is unbearable and repulsive. It seems incongruous to die in a park laid out by Le Nôtre. . . . Here, on the other hand, in these deserts created for grief, tragedy, and repentance, in these fields trampled and withered for all time by Attila, under this grey and hostile sky, life has little value. . . . What does it matter whether one lives or dies. . . . If I had been told six months ago that I should one day find myself under a hurricane of shells, seeing my compatriots falling around me on every side, and that I should not even rise from the spot where I was exposed to the most horrible of deaths, I should never have believed him. There is a special mentality produced by war. . . . And all the more by this war, which is unlike any other. . . . Oh ! those Prussians ! It is they who in their retrogressive madness have taken us back to the

remotest ages, making war a savage subterranean operation, without any grandeur or any grace. . . .”

“The mines must be the most terrible things of all,” I said. “Of late there has hardly been an official *communiqué* which has not mentioned trenches destroyed by sap.”

The lieutenant intervened:

“Yes,” he explained, “mines are terrible, because of their mysterious quality. One sees the shells coming. . . . But the thought that under our trenches the Germans may be boring tunnels to fill them with dynamite and blow us all up, very often makes us uneasy. . . . Especially at night, when the silence is complete, the dull sounds that rise from the earth disturb our sleep. . . . Our engineers take soundings to try to locate places that have been mined, and when they find one they give their constructors a disagreeable surprise by blowing them up at the moment when they least expect it. Last week at La Grurie, in a single day we surprised five mines that the enemy was preparing for us. . . . But however many we discover, there are always more at the entrances of the villages, awaiting our attacks. When they recognize that they cannot defend a point they mine it, and fire it

as they retire. It is a terrible system. It seems that in Belgium they have mined the Grand' Place of Brussels, and the principal streets of Antwerp and Ghent. They don't intend to go without leaving an eternal souvenir of their barbarism."

Ch— made signs to me to approach the screen between our trench and the next.

"Listen," he murmured in my ear.

Two voices came up to us, two clear, rhythmical southern voices, in which a light tone of pleasantry made an unsuccessful attempt to hide underlying depths of tender melancholy.

"What are you thinking about, old chap?"

"About your sister."

"That's not worth while . . . you know that she is lame and one-eyed, and that she doesn't love you."

"All right . . . nor do I . . . really."

"Have you had any news from home?"

"No. They have forgotten us. They think we are dead."

"It's six weeks now. . . ."

"No, it's only a month, we mustn't slander our women. Yours sent you your pipe and the tobacco a month ago. . . . As to my poor old woman. . . ."

"But if she can't write, old chap. Don't complain of her."

"I complain of her! . . . God forbid! What happens is that sometimes when I am sleeping, I imagine that my little old woman has come to me, and then when I wake I feel inclined to make off and go to see her."

"And I too, don't you suppose that I am always thinking of my wife and little girl? The child must have grown since I saw her last in July. Perhaps she won't know me when she sees me again. . . ."

"If it is in another world. . . ."

"What must be, must be. It is no use worrying over things one can't help."

"True for you, old fellow. . . . I am certain to get the military medal and my sergeant's stripes. . . . It came out twice when I had my fortune told with cards. The first time was at Verdun, at La Grosse's wine-shop. The second time a week ago, here."

"What about me?"

"Have you never had your fortune told by cards?"

"No."

"Well, I will tell it for you, if the fellows who are playing over there will lend me their cards

for a minute or two. I am not very great at it, but it is easy enough to find out if you are to be a sergeant. Hallo, you chaps over there ! Will you lend me your cards to tell the fortune of my honourable comrade, the fair-haired native of Carcassonne ? ”

Ch— seems to be touched to the heart. This combination of good temper and resignation, gentleness and moral vigour brings tears to his eyes. According to him all the mean, evil, and selfish elements in man disappear in tragic times, leaving only the noble virtues of heroism, self-sacrifice and fraternity, vital and vibrant. In the humblest as in the greatest, the smiling energy of the race is apparent. Where are now the party divisions which used to agitate every social stratum in the country ?

“ Did you notice that officer who saluted us in what you call the ante-room of the trenches ? ” asked Ch—. “ That man was my opponent at the last elections. . . . You can’t imagine the atrocious things we said of each other during the electoral campaign ! Now I am a deputy and a private soldier. He is an officer and not a deputy. And in the evening, when we are resting in the dug-outs, we play *écarté* together, the best friends in the world, and forget all about politics.”

Play is one of the great distractions of the trenches. When the soldiers can get hold of a pack of cards, a backgammon board or a set of chess-men, the time passes less heavily. Cards especially delight the French trooper. They play long games of manilla, forgetting cold, sleep, and danger.

“To show you what gamblers we are,” said a soldier, “I will tell you of a recent adventure. It happened just here, where the sergeant is standing. One morning, three weeks ago, we were having a four-handed game of manilla, and the others were looking on enviously behind us. There was only one pack of cards. A shell burst near us from time to time. We are used to that. . . . Much ado about nothing. However, that day it seems the Boches wanted to interrupt our game, and they were aiming at our trench in particular. Michel was against the wall here; the sergeant was opposite; the Bordelais was against the screen, and I was here. All of a sudden, pom! A shell in the trench. What an uproar there was! ‘Don’t move,’ cried the sergeant, ‘I’ve got the king!’ At that moment Michel fell back without a word, and the others carried him off. ‘Dead!’ cried the hospital orderly. Then one of the others who had been

looking on took the cards just as Michel had left them, and the game went on."

"The first essential of a happy life," said the soldier, "is to attach no importance to death. One gets to dread having no coffee or no tobacco more than being blown up by a shell. After all, no one can tell what will happen to him."

This smiling fatalism is to be found in every soul. And when any attempt is made to combat it, the true stories on which its philosophy is based rise to memory in crowds. One day a soldier took shelter carefully behind a tree, while his companions were fighting without any cover in the open. Yet the only one who was killed was the hidden combatant. Another day an artillery observer was at a farm with his telephone, directing the fire of some batteries a long way back behind the trenches. All of a sudden the Germans discovered him and sent two enormous shells at him. The farm collapsed, the roof took fire, the walls were shattered. The troopers in the first line thought that the poor observer must be buried under the ruins, and sent a message to the batteries saying that the telephone station must be reinstalled. In the evening, under cover of darkness, the observer, whom every one believed

to be dead, came out very quietly from the ruins without a scratch.

“Where heroism is really needed,” said the lieutenant, “is in bearing the life of inaction in these holes. When we can get out and attack in the open it is a kind of festival. But here! look . . . everything is quiet and empty. The battle began here three months ago, and as Barrès has said, after burying our first dead, we proceeded to bury our living selves. It is a siege-war, but no one knows whether we or the Germans are the besieged. One day us, the next day our enemies. A trench becomes a fortress, and to take it more lives are sacrificed than in fighting against a whole division in the plain. At the slightest movement a hail of shell-fire comes from every quarter of the horizon, and to reach the nearest village the road must be strewn with corpses. Naturally, commanding officers hesitate to decide upon an action. The Germans don’t attack much just here. All their energies are concentrated on the Argonne, where they lose ground every day, and on Flanders, where they sacrifice their men by hundreds of thousands. Here we have a state of siege with all its stagnation. From one end of the line to the other, the enemy has built, not the Great Wall, but the

Great Ditch of China. When shall we be able to dislodge them definitively? Our men are dying to rush out and charge. But . . .”

The lieutenant paused, as if afraid of saying something more than respect for discipline would permit. Soon a smile broke over his face, and changing the subject abruptly, he went on:

“Observance of periodical truces has reached such a point that even the most violent quarrels do not interrupt it. Not far from here, in the wood of Le Prêtre, in a place already famous, called the Fontaine du Père Horion, our soldiers meet the enemy every morning. The first who come are the first to fill their pitchers, and the others wait their turn patiently. There are quarrels over the veriest trifles at these meetings; but generally all ends amicably with exchanges of post-cards and cigarettes. A week ago, however, a newly arrived Prussian came near to spoiling everything. Hearing one of our men call him a Boche, he turned round in a fury, saying: ‘I won’t be insulted. I am an educated person, not an ignoramus like a Frenchman.’ There was a roar of laughter at this sally. Then the Prussian attacked the Frenchman with his fists. Other Frenchmen threw themselves upon other Germans, and the battle became general. Some

one hastened to tell the officer in command of the nearest trench, and he at once sent a sergeant with a picket to call the zealots to order. A German picket arrived at the same time. The two sergeants marched off their respective combatants, after saluting each other courteously."

Of all the chivalrous traditions of warfare, the only one that has survived is this truce imposed by hunger and thirst. It is not much, certainly. But when we think of the savagery of the battles fought five months ago in Belgium, and of the bands of women and children the Germans drove before them to serve as a living screen when they made sorties from villages, we cannot but look upon the amicable manifestations described by the lieutenant as a triumph of civilization, or rather of humanity.

It was time to go.

We returned by the lateral trench to the encampments round headquarters. What a length these ditches are! They had not seemed so interminable, nor so complicated, nor so damp when we arrived. At regular intervals a dug-out covered with tree-trunks opened by a rustic door left or right of the trench. Here the officers sleep, here the chiefs work, here munitions and provisions are stored. In one of them we saw a

rough table covered with papers, and a field telephone. The troglodyte who lives here is nothing less than a colonel, the one who gave me leave to visit the trenches, and who now asks if I have been interested by what I have seen.

“Interested and depressed,” I said, “for war is not what I imagined it.”

“Nor what I imagined it,” he replied. “It is the last manifestation of German genius—the warfare of moles,” he added, looking ironically round the dark hole which serves him for a dwelling.

A VISIT TO GENERAL JOFFRE

January 15.

IT is really extraordinary that a legend should have arisen and should now obtain without contradiction from anyone, of a taciturn, mysterious, and lugubrious Joffre. Daily, ever since the war began, his biographers have affirmed that there never was such a silent, reserved personage. Even his orderly officers, they say, hardly know the sound of his voice.

I repeated all this, like the rest. But when I found myself before the original of this strange, sombre portrait, I felt inclined to laugh both at my comrades and myself as I looked at the frank, good-tempered face of the Generalissimo. There is nothing alarming in this face but the bushy white eyebrows, so thick that they might have served Raffet as a superb pair of moustaches for one of his proudest grenadiers. The rest is at once sturdy and refined. The hands, with the daintily polished nails, are almost feminine; the green eyes, with their emerald reflexions, softened by depths of liquid tenderness, are full of refinement, as is also the profile, in spite of the somewhat swollen and purplish complexion and the heavy

white moustache. And the General's manners are pre-eminently refined.

Seeing us enter, accompanied by the colonel who had undertaken to present us, he left his armchair and advanced to meet us. He had a pleasant word for each of us. To our senior member, the editor of the *Journal de Genève*, he spoke of M. Feyler's articles, praising them as the best and the most accurate that have appeared dealing with the situation of the belligerent armies; to Sims, the American journalist, he said a few words about Yankee energy; then he stopped before me, and the accent with which he uttered the word "Spain" suggested his own semi-Spanish origin.

"When I hear the Catalan or Castilian dialect," he had said the night before to Colonel Echagüe, "I seem to be listening to the language of my soul."

He said "Spain" once more to me, and I know not why I fancied that there was a note of distress in his voice, as if the echo of that Gallophobe clericalism which has already penetrated into France seemed to him a kind of fratricidal treachery. But the touch of melancholy was gone in a moment. With a man of his strength and vigour, confidence is always the dominant

note. Turning to my friend J. France, the King's Commissary, as we call him, he gave me an opportunity of observing his athletic corpulence, and I admired his square shoulders, his wrestler's torso, his bull-neck—all, in fact, that with his delicate features constitutes the characteristic contrast of his race. There is no doubt that the Generalissimo of the Allies is the perfect type of the Pyrenean mountaineer, capable, like Roland's victors, of hurling whole rocks with their arms, and also capable of bowing gallantly to some lady retailing the highly spiced stories of the "Heptameron" in the shade of an embattled wall. Looking at him, I recalled, not the generals I had lately seen, nor the greatest modern warriors, but the Comte de Foix' gentlemen, Ernaton-Bourg-d'Espagne, Guillonet de Salenges, Barbazan, Montang de Saint-Basile, and all those magnificent soldiers who combined sagacity with courage, and who, after a day's fighting would amuse themselves by carrying on their shoulders loads of wood that no donkey could bear.

"The marvellous thing about him," say the officers who surround him, "is his power of endurance."

The old counsellor Pierre de Marca, who wrote the "History of Pyrenean Heroes," would not

have been astonished at his perpetual expeditions along a battle-line of seven hundred kilometres. These mountaineers, indeed, seem to be carved out of the granite of their peaks. At this very moment God alone knows whence this man, who changes his quarters every three days, has come, or whither he is going. The horses we saw at the door, covered with sweat and foam, must have been his. His officers, though they are young, looked weary. He, however, walked up and down from one end of the room to the other, talking and gesticulating, as fresh as if he had just got out of bed.

A few days ago the Generalissimo's sister, who still lives in her little house at Rivesaltes, and like Monluc's mother "sees from her window the two great brother kingdoms, France and Spain," said to a journalist of Bordeaux :

"We come of a noble Spanish family" ; adding a moment after : "Our father was a cooper."

These words, which seemed so anomalous to the Bordelais, explain the contrast we noted in the personality of the great soldier. There is something of the noble Spaniard, grave, proud, and haughty, in his bearing and his look. His hands are like those which stand out ivory white against black velvet doublets in certain pictures

by El Greco. His eyes have extraordinary depth, the kind of depth which in old races seems to come from the profundity of centuries. But at the same time his heavy walk, his athletic neck, and his huge shoulders are uncompromisingly plebeian.

And if those who know him are to be trusted, this double nature is also manifest in his soul, which is apparently very simple and even a little rough and rudimentary, but which has unexpected traits of charming delicacy and tenderness. His sister speaks of him, of his simplicity, his kindliness, and his fame with an enthusiasm not unmingled with astonishment. "What!" she seems to be saying, "our dear Joseph, who comes here every year to play cards with us, help us to tend the vines, and tell us stories about Africa, is the greatest man in France? Who would have thought it!"

Few generals, in fact, can have had so little superficial brilliance as Joffre. When Pau recommended that he should be appointed Vice-President of the Higher Council of War, the President of the Republic did not even know his name. Later, when the European conflict broke out, the whole world asked, on hearing of his nomination: "Who is this man?" For his life, which has been marked throughout by the

constant and obscure labour of the toiler, as well as by a sort of aristocratic aloofness, has been lived in absolute quietude. During the war of 1870 he served as a sub-lieutenant in one of the forts of Paris, and after peace was signed he returned to the Polytechnic to complete his engineering course. When he left the school with his two stripes as a lieutenant, he began his career as a constructor of fortifications. In Africa, in Asia, wherever France has built fortifications, the patient and vigorous will of the great Catalan has left its mark.

"Nobody can make trenches like Joseph," said his sister. "Those he dug with his own hands to prevent the inundation of the vineyards are still to be seen in our father's orchard."

Then she added :

"When he became a general, one of the youngest generals in France, his friends no longer dared to call him 'thou.' "

Here again there is the same combination of pride and simplicity.

In the town-hall at Meaux, where Joffre received us, of course he talked of the war.

"We didn't want it," he cried ; "we didn't even think it was possible. The responsibility for it is terrible. There is not a single French-

man who would have been capable of letting loose such a pandemonium. History never foresaw such a colossal struggle. But as it has been forced on us, so much the worse for our enemies. The country will do what is necessary to obtain victory."

There was a brief silence. . . . An energetic movement of the right hand, which seemed to be seeking a point of support for the fist ; then a clear look which enveloped us all, and finally a dry, vibrating phrase :

"This victory is ours."

Yes, the phrase was not "will be ours" as several of my colleagues have written, but "is ours." I still hear the syllables, I still note the tone, I still see the fire of his green eyes. With his steadfast faith, impassable and unshakable, the Generalissimo foresees the gigantic sum of the long struggle. He had foreseen the reverses of the early days ; and although he does not say so, we divine that when he said France did not want war, and had not even deemed it possible, he was thinking that she was not altogether prepared for it. A democracy cannot act like an empire, and manufacture cannon without the knowledge of the people, nor create regiment after regiment without the authority

of the Chambers, nor fix the date of a future attack without a manifestation of the national will. But when the democracy is France, it will find at the supreme moment of peril, those moral and material elements that other nations, apparently stronger, could never improvise. In the year 1870, which resembles this only in the blood it has seen spilt, the country, without arms and without leaders, when Metz had fallen and Paris was invested, yet managed to organize that army of the Loire which gained the victory of Coulmiers in the midst of disaster. To-day, after a strategic retreat, during which the formidable nucleus of defence was being formed, the first great encounter on French territory was a magnificent triumph. After the Battle of the Marne, the whole world looked forward as to an approaching reality, to the defeat of Germany and the prospect of a new Europe, no longer living under the obsession of a menace of war, rising and falling like a tide at the caprice of two Emperors. But Joffre did not wait for the first visible success before feeling confidence. The mobilization and the unity of the country had been enough for him. And this was why, when others doubted and the nerves of the nation were quivering, he, calm as ever, continued to say :

“Victory is ours.”

He does not seem even to share the anxiety which makes the Allies in general wish for Russian triumphs to hasten the progress of the war by weakening the Germans, the Austrians, and the Turks. Captain M., a writer on the staff of the *Illustration*, said to him a short time ago :

“The necessity of reinforcing their Oriental line will oblige the Germans to withdraw some troops from France.”

Without a moment's hesitation, Joffre replied :

“I have not the slightest wish to see any diminution of the forces against which we are fighting. The Russians will advance more rapidly if all continues as it is at present. I will undertake to force back what I have in front of me. There is no need to hurry without good reason.”

In all circumstances the Generalissimo manifests the same patient confidence. A few days ago, when he went to Alsace to induct the French officials who were to organize the administration of the reconquered territory, he made the following speech to the representatives of the Alsatian population :

“Our return to this territory which has been for forty-four years in the power of Germany, is

definitive. We are once more reunited, and for ever. France brings you, together with the liberty she has always represented, respect for your beliefs and customs. I am France and you are Alsace. I bring you the kiss of France."

It would be flattery to say that his speech is eloquent. Although he is neither silent nor taciturn, he does not attach a very great importance to words. He speaks clearly, seeking definite terms, and punctuates his speech with broad, vigorous gestures. His right hand seems to grasp ideas, to press them and squeeze the essence out of them, to offer it at last with a precise gesture to his auditors. Everything takes the form of action with him. Lightnings flash from his keen eyes, sparkle, illumine his thought, and then disappear as if to feed the inner fire of his meditations. His austere face seems hardly to know the soft repose of smiles.

During a visit paid to him by Parisian journalists, a photographer asked leave to take his portrait.

"I don't like being photographed," he said, "but I must not refuse you. Only make haste."

The journalist-photographer, rather disconcerted, could not get his camera into order at once.

"You are not so clever as the Queen of the Belgians," said the General, seeing his embarrassment. "She photographed me in a moment. You should get her to give you a lesson."

Every one laughed except the General, who, serious and patient, continued to gaze at the camera.

When the operation was over, fearing no doubt that he had mortified the poor reporter by his words, he went up to him and asked to have a proof of the portrait sent to him.

The editor of the *Journal de Genève*, with his dignified Protestant gravity and his precise eloquence, seemed to please him best among our company. He addressed him in particular, asking if we had been interested by our pilgrimage among the battle-fields.

I took advantage of a momentary silence to tell him I had read in the American papers that the Spaniards of Buenos Ayres and Montevideo had opened a subscription to present him with a sword.

Something like the shadow of a smile, a quarter smile, appeared under his white moustache.

Then turning to the Swiss pastor again, he assured him of his wish that we should see everything and understand everything.

“We,” he adds, “are not afraid of the light. What we are doing may and ought to be published. The whole country has armed itself with admirable enthusiasm. If we have any difficulties, they are caused by the numbers of old or weakly men who ask us to take them as soldiers, and whom we are obliged to refuse. Say what you have seen, it will be the greatest service you can do us: Our moral forces are immense, and you know Bonaparte has told us that victory is a matter of moral force. . . . The world does not know France well.”

So saying, Joffre turned to the journalists on his right: an American, a Scandinavian, and myself. And as his words cannot apply to my friends, whose countries pay perpetual homage to French heroism, French enthusiasm, and French solidarity, I imagine it to be for Spain, “his” Spain, that he speaks thus. Remembering his words to Colonel Echagüe, I understand the grief of this man, the representative, not of a political party, but of a race and an ideal, when he remembers that the men of the country nearest to his heart, his compatriots, we might say, are not all unanimous as they should be in supporting, at least by sympathy, if not by arms, the cause his troops are defending. Noting his severe

expression, I long to say to him : " Great Liberal Spain, thinking Spain, the Spain of Peréz Galdos, of Blasco Ibanez, of Romanonès, of Melquiadès Alvarez, the Spain that is neither snobbish nor Carlist, the Spain that incarnates the true soul of to-day and to-morrow, will always see in France her chosen sister." But have I any right to make solemn declarations to him ?

Still addressing the editor of the *Journal de Genève*, the great chief went on to speak enthusiastically of soldiers, officers, and simple civilians alike.

" It is they who win battles," he said, " not I. The Generalissimo's part is almost played when he has established his line of attack and disposed the armies that are to fight in due order. . . . Then all depends upon which troops show most resistance, most tenacity, most faith in their ultimate triumph."

Then making the familiar gesture with his right hand once more, he added :

" Victory is ours, there is no doubt about it."

One of my colleagues, referring to the Battle of the Marne, the scene of which we had just visited, said :

" You know, General, you have won the greatest battle of modern times."

“What I *do* know,” he replied, “is that I shall soon have earned permanent peace in a little house in the Pyrenees.”

This phrase, in which all the Parisian journalists found an evidence of simplicity and modesty, has a deeper significance for me. I do not imagine the “little house” of his dreams as a warm, peaceful retreat, but as an eagle’s eyrie among the rocks. When once peace is established, what indeed would the victor want in Paris? Worldly honours are not of his kingdom. Seeing him without plumes, or gold lace or crosses, or vanities of any kind, one divines that all his energies are concentrated on his inner life, and that his only material needs are activity, movement, and muscular effort. Four centuries ago he would have shut himself up, his battles over, in some dark manor-house, where he would have rivalled the comrades of his sufferings and his glory in hardihood. Now, his one desire is to return to his native place to live with the memories of sublime hours. And perhaps, as he cannot imitate Ernaton Bourg-d’Espagne and Montang de Saint-Basile, he will busy himself in the intervals of his gallops among the mountains, in writing “Commentaries” on his own life, after the manner of another compatriot, Monluc.

THE RUINS OF CLERMONT-EN-ARGONNE

January 20.

EVER since we had passed by one December evening, the glimpse I had caught of those ruins, through the twilight, had pursued me. Each time our travels brought us near the Argonne, I had proposed to my companions that we should stop for an hour or two at Clermont. "The ruins are all alike," they objected. But I recalled the picture of those great, shattered walls stained crimson by the setting sun, and never failed to insist that Clermont was unique.

And then, in broad daylight, I saw through the cold grey fog that I had been wrong not to content myself with a memory. Nothing remained of that gorgeous spectacle of empurpled magic. The ruins were like all the other ruins, and but for the beauty of the situation, they would not even possess the sinister grandeur of other places where not a wall is standing. Happily, the hill on which the town was built is one of the most picturesque in the mountainous region of the Argonne. The pine-trees form a dark undula-

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ting curtain on the height, above the crumbling walls.

But when we penetrated into the labyrinth of narrow streets full of débris we found ourselves before the eternal picture we had seen yesterday, and the day before, and perpetually ever since we had been within the war-zone, a picture of silent grief, a tragic picture without surprises, a terrible, heartrending picture of atrocious monotony, not even so extensive as at Sermaize and Gerbéviller.

“It was a town of only a thousand inhabitants!” exclaimed one of my colleagues, noting my disappointment.

This is true. The ancient Clermont, which was the capital of an almost independent county, is but an historical memory. The modern Clermont has no further importance than that of being a cross-roads to which the routes of the invader converge, the routes from Germany to Paris by way of Verdun and Bar-le-Duc. One of the inhabitants led us through the débris to the centre of the town, making us stop before the dwellings which have suffered most. Of some of these only the foundations remain. Others have kept their four outer walls intact. They have all that modest, inoffensive look which makes the attack upon them all the more odious, and

awakes wonder as to the mysterious motive-power which can incite the Germans against the poor, and cause the destruction of their humble dwellings.

The streets climb the hillside like goat-tracks, showing the dark foliage of the forest in perspective. The roar of the guns is still audible here, making the poor people who are camping among the ruins aware that the enemy is still close at hand. Black mud, composed of calcined earth, impeded our ascent. From time to time a livid face appeared, peering at us inquisitively. Ragged, famished-looking children followed us in silence. Soldiers of the garrison passed in muddy uniforms going to the neighbouring trenches.

What a miserable business war is !

Amidst all the ruins and horrors, one figure emerges which recalls the more chivalrous warfare of the past. It is the figure of a Prussian officer, a captain of the reserve since the outbreak of hostilities, and before that a Berlin man of letters, famous and popular. His name, if he is still living, is Bruno Franck, and this name deserves to be respectfully remembered in a country where the most illustrious representatives of German aristocracy have left only the bloody traces of their cruelty. The inhabitant of Clermont who

told us of him, was one of the few who would not flee from the town before the invader.

“The house I live in,” he said, “was the one in which Prince Bismarck lodged forty-four years ago. The Germans used to come and visit it before the war with evident veneration, for it was there the Council of War which preceded the Battle of Sedan was held. A rich Hamburger once wanted to buy it, but I would not even answer his proposal. The officers who invaded our town must have known all about it, for the first thing they did was to put a placard on my door, ordering their soldiers to abstain from any acts of hostility against the historic dwelling. For my part, I shut myself up quickly, preferring to run any risks rather than abandon my town. The stories current in the neighbourhood, however, were not such as to make anyone desirous of meeting the Kaiser’s soldiers. Everywhere they left the corpses of innocent civilians in their wake. Mayors and priests were their favourite victims. I could not, therefore, blame such of our ædiles as followed the general exodus. But, personally, I preferred to remain. After all, it doesn’t much matter whether one dies in one way or in another. On September 5 a captain knocked at my door, and I opened it myself,

making up my mind to answer him in the tone he adopted towards me. I was greatly surprised to find myself in the presence of a very refined person, who spoke French admirably, and began by apologizing for the trouble he was giving me. 'Do you know why the Mayor left?' he asked. I said I did not. 'I have come to ask you, in the name of my commanding officer, to undertake the administration of the Commune, that the normal life of the place may not be interrupted.' Knowing the laws of war, I accepted the orders of our invaders, but asked why this duty had been imposed upon me. 'Because you are a knight of the Legion of Honour,' replied the captain. Then he told me that he loved France as one of the most cultured nations of the world, that he was familiar with our literature; that he had spent some happy years in Paris, enjoying our museums, and that the war was the greatest sorrow imaginable to him, for he had always hoped that France and Germany would come to an understanding some day, and work together for the good of humanity. Before he left me he asked me to collect any arms in the possession of the few persons remaining in the town. 'They are all old men and women,' I replied, 'and it is not likely that they have any weapons. I myself

have a sword presented by Napoleon to one of my ancestors. Must I give that up ?' 'No,' he exclaimed, 'certainly not. A relic. May I be allowed to see it ?' He stood silent and thoughtful before my old sword for five minutes and then saluted it. My relations with the German officers were comparatively amicable. They all assured me that Clermont should be respected, and setting aside the looting of forsaken houses, I had not much to complain of, until one day a fire suddenly broke out in a watchmaker's shop. I hastened to the Kommandatur. The general vowed that his soldiers were not responsible. The flames spread from house to house, destroying everything, and I was in despair, because I had no means of coping with them. The general declared that he regretted the disaster as much as I did, and that from information he had received it was a pure accident. A spirit-lamp had been broken. The truth was very different, for the fire had been deliberately kindled by the soldiers."

"And what did your Captain Bruno Franck say to this ?" we asked.

"He seemed very much distressed, almost ashamed, but a captain can't do much. Ah ! if *he* had been the commanding officer ! . . ."

In the streets where we walked among the ruins

guided by our amiable cicerone, the soldiers we met saluted the worthy Clermontois. It was evident that all who knew him esteemed him. His grave face bears the impress of goodness and uprightness. There is a steady flame in his eyes which indicates extraordinary strength of character. A poor woman speaking of him to us said : " He is a hero."

As a fact, here as at Gerbéviller, Épernay, and many other martyred places, the true hero of these days of woe was a woman, a Sister of Charity.

Every one spoke of her with respect and emotion. When the Germans entered Clermont after bombarding the town, the inhabitants fled towards the south. The houses were empty, the shops forsaken. Almost alone, the Sisters at the hospital continued to nurse the sick, among whom there were some French soldiers. On September 5, at daybreak, several German officers presented themselves at the hospital, and broke in the door instead of waiting to have it opened to them. Revolver in hand, they came into the courtyard with threatening looks, demanding food and drink. A nun came out to them and said : " If you are sick or wounded, you are welcome ; all who suffer are at home here." The officers paused, not knowing what to ask. At last one of them, who

could speak French, cried : " This belongs to the Emperor of Germany. All France belongs to the Emperor of Germany ! " " This belongs to the poor," said the Sister gently, holding out her arms to prevent them from advancing. A lieutenant aimed his revolver at her. " Shoot me if you like," said the holy woman, " but you shall not come in." At this moment a colonel appeared on the scene, and the officers at once changed their tone. The colonel very courteously asked leave to send his wounded to the hospital, and assured the Sister that she need fear nothing from his soldiers. " We are not savages," he declared. In the evening the wounded Germans began to come in, and Sister Gabrielle tended them with the same devotion she had shown to the French soldiers. The colonel went daily to visit the hospital, and never failed to praise the zeal of the nurses. " Fear nothing," he repeated. One evening, however, when the fire was raging in the town, the Sister saw with horror that the flames were already licking the walls of the hospital. " What can we do ? " said the colonel. " The only plan is to remove the patients and leave the house." " If the house is to burn," she replied, " I will die in the flames, for I promised I would never leave it." And there was such determina-

tion in her voice that the Prussians, greatly impressed, pulled down the adjoining walls and isolated the hospital.

The Mayor, speaking of Sister Gabrielle to us, concluded with these words :

“ They are all alike, these saintly women.”

The hospital is the only building left intact in the midst of the ruined town ; it shelters not only the sick, but many of the destitute whose homes have been destroyed. There is something strangely moving in the sight of the huge white house full of life and movement rising as in a cemetery, dominating the dark wood in the depths of which one of the most agitating acts of the formidable Franco-German tragedy is in progress.

FROM TOUL TO NANCY

January 25.

WE shall be at Nancy this evening. "We might get there in half an hour by the direct road," says our guide, "but it will be more interesting and more agreeable to follow the banks of the Moselle, and see Fontenoy, Liverdun, and Frouard."

My colleagues do not appear to be very enthusiastic about such an excursion to places where no fighting has taken place. Even here at Toul, where we are stopping for a few hours, they will not deign to leave the hotel and inspect the town. What is there to interest them in a fortress where the guns have not fired a single shot? They are all true war correspondents, and my love for churches, woods, and villages makes them smile.

"Then you don't care to see Saint-Etienne, nor the Bishop's Palace, nor the old garden?" I asked.

"No," replied an Englishman curtly, in the name of the company.

A lieutenant agreed to accompany me that I might not be arrested by sentries. In the

solitary streets our footsteps echoed as in a cloister. We spoke involuntarily in hushed tones, as if fearing to awaken the ghosts which seem to be the only inhabitants of the place.

In normal times Toul has 12,000 inhabitants, 6000 of whom are soldiers and 6000 civilians. On the declaration of war, when it was feared that Nancy could not resist the German onslaught, and that the fortress would be besieged, the authorities expelled nearly all the civilians, fearing they might hamper the defenders, as in 1870. It became evident shortly afterwards that the enemy could not approach any of the great Eastern fortresses, and a portion of the troops also evacuated Toul and went off to fight in the north. Of its 12,000 inhabitants, there appear to be hardly twelve left in the town which proudly claims to be the most ancient and the most faithful in France. In my walk through the central quarters I did not meet a single living person, I did not see a single open window, I did not hear a single human voice. The narrow, ill-paved streets stretch out and zigzag in an interminable labyrinth, leading us past forsaken houses and closed churches, without ever bringing us to a spot where there was any life or movement.

“The population emigrated westward in the

early days of the war, and has not returned entirely," said the officer.

In reality, no one seems to have come back.

The noble mansions of former canons raise their decaying façades, eloquent of past splendours. At every step there is a stone shield with a blackened coat-of-arms. Mitres and swords are interlaced, encircled by Latin mottoes recalling episcopal and martial pomp. Through iron gates we see austere flights of time-worn stone steps.

"Where do the officers of the garrison live?" I asked my lieutenant.

"Outside the town in the quarter of Les Ecrouves," he replied.

And fearing, no doubt, that our lonely walk was not to my taste, he proposed that we should leave the centre of the town in search of a little life and movement near the railway station, where we should find shops and cafés open.

"It is a pity that we may not see the forts," he said.

The truth is that fortresses interest me much less than churches, since my great disappointment at Verdun in respect of the great subterranean forts. If the fortresses in question were the stately structures of Vauban, whose battlemented walls stand out upon some height, I should

certainly like to go and inspect them. But here, as in all modern citadels, even the guns are invisible. "That is the Redoubt of Tillot," said some one this morning, pointing out an insignificant looking hill covered with small leafless trees, in the middle of the plain. And the eleven other defences of Toul are, no doubt, all like this in their formidable occult power.

Yet what endless talk there was four months ago of the forts of this place ! Without any very terrific sacrifice, the Germans might seize Nancy, an undefended position, an open town without guns. But when once they reached the heights of Gondreville, their triumphal march would be stopped dead. Engineers had been working for forty years, burying cannon in inexpugnable positions. For forty years the country had put its trust in the art and science of the constructors of these cemented casemates. And now, after a hundred and fifty days of war, neither Toul, Épinal, nor Verdun had had to fire a single shot. Nancy, with no defences but her improvised trenches, had not only been able to defend herself, but to win a victory.

The sad part of it all is that in view of the new guns, which destroy an armour-plated casemate as if it were a straw hut, modern fortifica-

tions have become as obsolete as mediæval fortresses.

What will become of Toul ? The only thing that has saved it from death during the last half-century has been its redoubts. When these disappear, as they must do, all that will be left will be the towers of its churches, the walls of its episcopal palace, the cloisters of its convents—in short, its past.

And even this past is so vague, so obscure, so remote. Like its dark streets, its history forms a labyrinth of martial and religious adventures, in which it is easy to lose oneself without ever coming upon any luminous points. Before we get to Charles V, routed before its walls, or to Henry II, entering the city in triumph, we have to wade through innumerable conspiracies of canons and citizens, who in their struggles for power, one day convert what was the day before an episcopal principality into a republic, and the next submit to a Duke of Lorraine to escape anarchy or despotism.

“Mitre on head and axe in hand,” says the local chronicle, “prelates converted the cathedral into a guard-room, resting neither day nor night.”

They were indeed terrible persons, those lords of the Moselle country ! For centuries, while

acknowledging the authority of the Emperor in theory, in practice they did only what seemed good in their own eyes. The dark, strong towers of Saint-Etienne proclaim plainly enough that Christian gentleness was not among their virtues. Even the ornaments, delicate as lacework, which the Renaissance laid on the façade of this famous church, fail to modify its bellicose aspect. And as in the cathedral, so in all the ancient structures we noticed during our walk, the fiery temperament of the race makes itself felt. The axe gleams beside the mitre at every step.

But alas ! the city of bishops and communalists, now that it has neither communalists nor bishops, is a dead city, as entirely dead as Toledo, Siena, or Bruges-la-Morte. No brazen harmony sounds from its dark towers to enliven the oppressive loneliness of the atmosphere. The old, nail-studded doors seem closed for ever. And when we raise our eyes above, seeking something to relieve the harsh melancholy of the walls, we see only the tragic rock which dominates the enceinte of the citadel, like a dismantled acropolis. How splendid a feudal castle, crowned with crenelated towers, would look upon this frowning promontory ! But here as at Verdun, the menace does not rise in noble arrogance upon the heights ; it

crouches in the hollows of defiles, and hides its fiery jaws in the earth.

As we were leaving Toul, one of the officers who had accompanied us indicated the line of forts, whose fires cross those of the advanced defences of Verdun towards the north on the other side of the Moselle.

“Only one,” he said, “the most isolated of them all, has been destroyed by the Germans.”

Following the direction in which he pointed, I tried to discover something in the landscape on our left suggestive of the presence of guns. The snow had thrown its winding-sheet over the lonely plain, and in the distance, far beyond Gondreville, the wood of Lagney, with its dark branches, closed the horizon. The only touch of animation in the monotonous picture was the sinuous course of the river, appearing and disappearing in the contours of the road. Yet we knew that the whole region was full of guns, hidden under the frozen earth, and ready to break the vast peace of the landscape at the slightest alarm.

“The destroyed fort down there, very far off, towards the north, is Troyon,” continued our guide. “Did you hear about the defence? It was one of the finest episodes in the present war.”

Then he added with perfect simplicity :

“ I was there.”

The two other journalists who were in the car with us, hearing these words, turned sharply to our officer.

“ You were at Troyon ! ” they exclaimed.

The surprise with which they contemplated this man, so gentle and so unheroic in appearance, was evident. It must be admitted that he is no paladin to look at ! In his severe artillery uniform, talking in a subdued voice, his short-sighted eyes peering timidly through his spectacles, he seems the perfect type of the honest reservist who, after the declaration of war, had to quit his Parisian office to serve in commissariat or hospital.

He answered very quietly : “ Yes, I was there.”

Then we all begged him to tell us what he remembered, and he began at once, without any reluctance.

“ Like every one else, you complain that a modern fort is not very imposing from the outside. It is a pity that we can't go as far as the ruins of Troyon, that you might see what a fort really is. Now that the shells of the big Austrian guns have demolished the mass of

cement and steel which covered it, the ruin gives a very exact idea of the subterranean fort. The iron girders that supported the outer shell have been torn into a thousand pieces, and the enormous vaults have been shivered as if they had been made of cardboard, so that the inner structure appears as a formidable hole, like those Eastern temples which have been half-buried by the sands of the desert. The ruin looks more like the result of a cataclysm than a work of man's hand. Our engineers had spent twenty years constructing a gigantic invisible palace in the bowels of the earth. In one morning, modern explosives gutted it and left it like one of those mediæval citadels which now stand like stage scenery on the summits of ancient military positions. I think personally that one effect of the present war will be the complete disappearance of permanent fortifications. Formerly, when the means of defence were superior to those of attack, it was natural to erect stone structures at strategic points. A battlemented wall was almost impregnable against the axes, ladders, and war-engines of Saint-Louis. Nowadays, a 420 mm. gun laid twenty kilometres off, will destroy the most Cyclopean tower in a few hours. Hence the absurd situation, that our

troops in the field are defending the fortresses of Verdun and Toul, instead of being covered by those fortresses. If the Germans could succeed in placing their guns within range of Gondreville or Haudainville, we knew that any attempt at resistance would be futile. When the enemy coming from Metz reached the heights of the Meuse, we said at Troyon that it was all over with us. The bombardment began at seven o'clock on the morning of September 8, and at 10 o'clock our cuirass of steel and cement was already mortally shattered. What a sight it was ! Every shell blew one of our galleries to pieces ! The most highly skilled of our gunners came out into the open with extraordinary heroism, to try to locate the batteries that were hammering us. But guns are invisible when they are laid in the hollows of undulating ground. Besides, our pieces were outranged by those of the Germans, so that even if we had been able to place these we should not have been any better off. In a moment we realized our desperate position, for the French forces were on the other side of the Meuse, fighting a great battle. Our only remaining means of communication with the fortresses of Toul and Verdun was the telephone. 'Hold out for forty-eight hours,' said the Governor of

Toul, 'to prevent the enemy's artillery from advancing.' You may imagine what we thought of this order, when three hours had sufficed to destroy our casemates. Our Commandant replied : ' We will hold out as long as we have a man or a rifle left.' Our only hope was in our rifles. We proposed, as soon as the fort was destroyed, to prevent the enemy from occupying it, defending ourselves in a hand-to-hand fight. We saw nobody all day. The shells came from an incredible distance every few minutes, methodically and implacably, and each tore a fresh breach in our walls. A cloud of smoke and dust hung over the fort, and the air vibrated as if a whirlwind had been let loose. The blast of the shells was strong enough to knock us down when we were a few yards from their trajectory. At first we officers feared that our men, who were all raw recruits, would never endure this infernal racket under a perpetual storm of fire. But not one of them showed the least sign of flinching. With their invincible habit of jesting, they laughed at the hurricane and waited for death with songs on their lips. Every minute one or the other would fall, literally torn to rags as a vault or a wall gave way. All the rest murmured the stereotyped funeral oration of the battle-field :

‘Poor devil!’ and nothing more. At six in the evening the Commandant said to me: ‘With men like ours we might hold out until there is not a single man left. As long as we have one, the Germans shan’t have these ruins.’ The Germans, meanwhile, seemed in no hurry to attack us, though they must have been perfectly well aware of the effect of their shells. They continued to bombard us the whole night of September 8. On the 9th, about ten o’clock in the morning, we saw a German column advancing, and we prepared to attack it. Our observer called out to us from his shelter that they were showing the white flag. When the envoys, escorted by a few soldiers, arrived at a distance of 100 paces from us, an officer advanced towards the fort, and addressing our Commandant, who had gone out to meet him, he asked him to surrender. The rapid dialogue that ensued between our chief and the enemy evoked the wars of the First Empire, and the superb insolence of Napoleon’s Marshals. ‘Surrender! Never!’ ‘Resistance is useless; our forces occupy the entire district and the fortress is a ruin.’ ‘No matter!’ ‘To-day we should allow you the honours of war, whereas to-morrow you will have to surrender unconditionally.’ ‘You may have

our dead bodies, but you won't get any of us alive.' 'For the third time, will you surrender?' 'For the third time, no!' The German officer seemed to be deeply and sincerely moved. He was silent for a few moments, looking at the ruins of Troyon. Then, addressing us all, he cried: 'This is terrible, but it's admirable.' 'We are doing our duty, that's all,' replied the Commandant. Two hours later the bombardment began, more intense and more furious, but less methodical. At one moment, fifteen shells came at a time, then twenty or thirty minutes would pass without a shot. The fort, as a matter of fact, had nothing more to lose, for its walls had been destroyed. All we hoped was to prevent it from falling into the hands of the enemy. Accordingly, when we saw the Bavarians advancing in close formation to the attack we were full of joy. At last we, too, would be able to fire, we, too, would be able to kill! They had scarcely crossed the bridge when our guns began to salute them. Oh! how well I remember that fight! The Commandant had put me in an outpost shelter to direct the fire of the batteries. The Bavarians marched in groups, holding each other by the hand, and our fire mowed down the immense human mass like a

field of corn. Four, five, six times they returned to the attack, and each time our guns drove them back, decimating them. 'To-morrow,' we thought, watching the last useless effort, 'the attack will be in greater force.' That very night a division from Toul came up to reinforce us."

The officer seemed transformed. His eyes sparkled behind his spectacles, his lips contracted and quivered under his fair moustache. But as soon as one of us tried to make him talk of himself and praised his valour, his face relapsed into the tranquil, short-sighted gravity of half an hour ago. "Oh!" he exclaimed, "I only did my duty, like all the rest. In war a man is only an insignificant wheel in a vast mechanism. Whether he will or no, he is perforce carried away by the general movement. The only admirable things are isolated actions, individual deeds of daring. An aviator, all alone in his frail craft, in a storm of bullets, that is magnificent! But we artillerymen are just a part of our batteries, we scarcely exist."

Listening to the officer, we had passed almost without seeing them, those fields of the Moselle which have been the scene of a hundred tragedies. Behind us lay Fontenoy, where a band of sharpshooters destroyed a strategic bridge in 1870 with

legendary heroism. The river winds in and out in loops, and the blue line of its tortuous course relieved the vast snow-covered expanse. Suddenly the character of the ground changed, the woods surrounded us, the forest of Haye murmured in our ears.

“Liverdun,” cried some one, pointing to a ruined fortress, but not a fortress like Verdun or Toul ; this time it was an old romantic citadel, crowned with great towers and battlements.

“How different from Troyon this must seem to you !” I said to the artilleryman.

He scanned the grey walls, the pierced parapets, the huge galleries, the black moat, the vast posterns ; then he murmured very softly :

“Not so different as you think. In essentials the new fortresses are as fine as the old. The great difference is that the old ones stood on hill-tops, whilst the new are hidden underground. You have to see them in ruins before you can admire them properly.”

THE BATTLE-FIELD OF NANCY

February 4.

FOR the last three days we have been studying the battle-fields in which the crosses on the graves mark out the fighting points like the little flags upon a map. We have seen Sainte-Geneviève, Amance, the wood of Champenoux, and all the heights of Le Grand Couronné. We have traversed a front of over fifty kilometres, on which hundreds of thousands of men have been engaged. We have been down into the holes where innumerable batteries established their line of fire, and finally, we visited a great many villages converted into heaps of ruins. A staff captain explained the principal military operations at the beginning of September to us, and declared that, on the whole, they constitute one of the most formidable and glorious episodes in the history of France.

I suppose that all this was of great interest to my colleagues, the true war correspondents. But I am bound to confess to my shame, that in spite of my persevering efforts, I am still unable to form any definite idea of a great modern battle.

“Over there, on the right,” said our learned

guide to us to-day, "is the army that is defending Pont-à-Mousson. To the left, another army is holding back the advance of the enemy on the banks of the river. Look for yourself. . . ."

In vain did I try to verify all this ; I could see nothing but the peaceful Lorraine landscape, undulating in the tranquil tide of its hills, stretching away and away to infinity. The huge graveyard is the only thing that marks the limits of the picture. But because, alas ! it is so huge, the picture disconcerts us and prevents us from forming a concrete image of the drama.

Placing himself opposite the wood of Champenoux, the black branches of which stood out like a mourning veil on the winding-sheet of snow, our captain described the furious attack of September 7.

"Towards morning," he said, "the Prussian troops, who were ordered to take Nancy that the Emperor might make his solemn entry into the capital of Lorraine, and establish himself in Duke René's palace, marched down the slopes of the Seille, and crossed the river by the bridges of Chambley, Moncel, Brin, and Bioncourt. After a general attack they placed their siege-guns on the crests of Doncourt, Bourthecourt, and Rozebois. The shells poured upon Amance and its

environs, at once set fire to the villages of Bouxières - aux - Chênes, Fleur - Fontaine, and Lâitre. The church towers collapsed like houses of cards. The woods crackled and flamed in the hurricane of fire and steel. Protected by this infernal artillery, the battalions advanced in perfect order, and as our field guns decimated them, tearing convulsive breaches in the grandiose human wall, other troops hurried forward to fill the gaps, passing over the corpses of their comrades. The solemn clamour of '*Deutschland über Alles*,' intoned by thousands of voices, rose in the air mingling dirge-like with the roar of the guns. It was like an avalanche advancing, an avalanche so mighty, so compact, and so methodical that no dyke seemed capable of resisting it. Amance was given up for lost. And if once Amance were in the power of the enemy, the high road, open and defenceless, would be but a broad avenue for a triumphal march, the goal of which would necessarily have been Nancy. The information received at Headquarters stated that William II, with 10,000 cavalry of the Guard, was in the wood of Morel, ready for the great advance which was to bring him with banners flying and fifes sounding, to the Place Stanislas. It would be an exaggeration to say that our chiefs,

with their relatively small numbers, hoped to offer a successful resistance to the onslaught of our enemies. All they were bent on for the moment was to gain a few hours. 'If we can hold our own all day,' said a general, 'we shall have performed a miracle.' And this miracle actually came to pass. When night began to fall the avalanche had not yet overwhelmed us; our 75's kept them at bay; our fire broke the mass at several points. Night came at last, lighted by incendiary fires, and with the night a ray of hope dawned in the French soul. But on the following day the turmoil became more violent, the attack more intense, the enemy stronger. Velaine soon succumbed, and the defile between the two hills of Amance was filled with Uhlans. 'We are lost,' thought the most valiant of our chiefs. At this moment our reinforcements, which had just come up, advanced from all our positions, not in close formation, but in slender lines of marksmen. The guns of Amance suddenly came into action again, mowing down the fields of pointed helmets like ripe corn. The trumpets sounded in our ranks; something like a fever ran through every soul; the very woods seemed to quiver joyously. The Emperor, whose white silhouette dominated the tumult, ordered up his reserves, and a whole

army corps from the rear advanced towards the bridges which the first columns had crossed the day before without difficulty. But we had now got the range so perfectly that not a single enemy succeeded in passing the river. No matter! The white horseman shook his golden eagle, crying: 'Forward, forward! *Deutschland über Alles!*' For a few hours the shock was so terrific that the air vibrated, shaken by the fire of the guns. A kind of frenzy ran through the lines on both sides. The Emperor, livid, continued to cry: 'Forward.' But suddenly, as if moved by an irresistible impulse, the avalanche fell back, sweeping with it in its retreat the 10,000 horsemen of the Imperial Guard, who galloped towards Metz in disorder. What was a victory the day before had become a rout. On the following day, when our general was preparing for a fresh struggle, a messenger with a flag of truce arrived, asking for an armistice of twenty-four hours to bury the dead. 'In the name of His Majesty,' he said. The French commander bowed and replied: 'In twenty-four hours, when the Emperor has buried his thousands of corpses, we will expect him again.' But His Majesty has not been seen here since."

The captain made a sweeping gesture with his arms as if to embrace the whole scene of the

struggle. Instinctively I looked into the distance for some point that might suggest a battle-field. The hills cut across the landscape, and through the defiles, all that can be seen beyond are other white hills, crowned by black pine-woods. In spite of all my efforts I can form no idea of a modern battle, fought with guns that have a range of six kilometres. I have to recall all the terrible details, to think of the thousands of German dead, to imagine the distant masses of the human avalanche, in order to grasp the grandeur of the struggle.

"The battle you have just described to us," said I to our cicerone, "must have been one of the most terrible in the present war."

An enigmatic and contemptuous smile rises to the officer's lips.

"The action I have been talking about," he said, "was merely an episode in the Battle of Nancy, and the Battle of Nancy was only an episode in the great Battle of the Marne."

One cannot but feel utterly disconcerted at the proportions of these military operations of the twentieth century. An extent of ground which the eye cannot even take in, is not the picture, but a little corner of the picture. And this little corner would have sufficed for all the

campaigns described by Froissart, which have thrilled us throughout the ages.

“The Battle of Nancy,” said our guide, turning to the left, “took place on a line of over fifty kilometres and lasted more than a fortnight. Ever since August 20, one of our divisions had been in the valley of the Moselle, ready to defend the road leading to the capital of Lorraine. At Morhange we suffered a cruel defeat, which enabled the Germans to take possession first of Nomeny, and then, in the early days of September, of Pont-à-Mousson. On September 4, when the enemy’s forces began to descend the heights of Château-Salines to attack our centre, they succeeded after a fierce struggle in bombarding our positions at Sainte-Geneviève.

“On the 6th the Germans, finding the ground poorly defended, turned, confident of success, to Loisy, where they were well aware that we had only a single company. What is a company nowadays? Nothing at all. Nevertheless, the company at Loisy, by entrenching themselves in the cemetery, and taking advantage of the hollows in the ground, succeeded not only in making a good defence all the evening of the 6th, but forced those who were attacking them to abandon their frontal advance and make for the

road to Sainte-Geneviève by a flanking movement. Do you know what troops were engaged against the company at Loisy? A whole regiment. This regiment was almost completely annihilated in the marshy ground, without achieving the slightest result. But the Germans don't spare their men. On the following day a formidable column rushed the heights of Cuittes, where they placed batteries which commanded our centre. Major M., who was in command at Sainte-Geneviève, saw his soldiers falling under a hail of shell. No matter. 'We won't give way an inch,' he cried. And the general had to send him a written order to induce him to retire towards the rearguard lines, here on the northern hills. It was then that the Emperor, seeing the way clear before his troops, gave the famous order of the day on the morning of the 7th, which ended thus: 'To-morrow, on to Nancy.' But to realize this dream it was necessary to dislodge our troops at Amance."

The captain, understanding that it was impossible for us to follow the movements of the army on the actual territory, unfolded his map, and pointed out the vast outlines of the battle. For three weeks several hundred thousands of men were manœuvring in this space, which

stretches from the gates of Saint-Nicolas to the woods of Lunéville. Following on the paper the red lines that pass by Dommartin, Laneuvelotte, Champenoux, Réméréville, Drouville, Sommerviller, and Héréménil, we grasped the immensity of the battle as a whole. Every position, with its height indicated by figures, is the key to a road; every road is the bulwark of a valley; every stream serves as a trench to defend a pass. For all its epic grandeur the conflict was made up of minute episodes. The company which by holding out for a whole day in a cemetery against several battalions enabled the reserves to come up in time, was a decisive and symbolic pawn on the general chess-board. But all this, which became clear upon a map, with the officer's commentary, was an impenetrable mystery when we attempted to picture it upon the actual landscape.

“It was down there the avalanche came,” we heard.

But we could see only the closed horizon. And this was hardly surprising, when we consider that looking out over the plain itself, and knowing that it was occupied at that very moment by a large number of batteries and many regiments, we could distinguish nothing but the undulating

landscape, silent and deserted. In this strange modern warfare, so different from that of old, what one sees least is war itself. The guns are buried. The men are buried. The words of command, passing over telephone wires also buried, call forth from the bowels of the earth torrents of fire which are like the eruption of a volcano. And the warriors who fight and die, unseeing and unseen, know nothing of their valour, their triumphs and their reverses, until a *communiqué* from the staff brings the final echoes of battle to them in their holes.

The learned officer who is our guide, talks with the enthusiasm of an expert of the methodical and occult character of the campaign.

"It is scientific war," he exclaims, and his short-sighted blue eyes sparkle behind his spectacles.

But far from sharing his joy, I feel sorrowful when I evoke, as I do on every contemporary battle-field I visit—great battle-fields, no doubt, and steeped, no doubt, in valiant blood—other fields less immense, in which History conjures up a vision of brilliant banners spread, and of the armies of the knights of old, who fell in the full light of day, and in the full flush of joy and pride.

THE ALPINE CHASSEURS IN THE VOSGES

February 18.

BROWN faces, graceful headgear, and mules harnessed as in the mountains of the South, transport us, for the moment, from the dark pine-woods of the Vosges, where we really are, to brighter and more familiar regions. "They are the Alpine Chasseurs," we are told. But for me, they evoke the azure of the Pyrenees with all its grace and animation, amidst the snows of the North. The fiery glances, the angular profiles, the broad gestures surprise us here as exotic features. The villagers of the Vosges, accustomed to a different type of soldier, are loud in admiration of their new defenders. "To us," declared a fair-haired young girl, "they are as strange as the Algerians and the Indians." To me, on the contrary, they speak of dearly loved regions, of the ascent of Basque slopes, of joyous sunny days spent in the motionless silence of Franco-Spanish frontier vegetation.

An Italian journalist whispers to me with sincere emotion :

"To think that these men were ready to fight

against us, and that now they seem to me almost compatriots, they are so like our own soldiers."

And indeed, the Alpins, with their agility, their slimness, and their sunburnt faces seem to have brought something of the warm brilliance of their southern skies to the cold mountains which dominate the territory of Alsace. Born on Alpine or Pyrenean heights, their French patriotism is no less profound than that of the Lorrains, and if they had been obliged to fight against Italy or Spain, nothing would have prevented them from doing their duty. But it is only necessary to question any one of them to be convinced that war in the Alps would have been a most painful duty to them.

"We are brothers!" cried a lieutenant, clasping the hand of a Milanese journalist.

The Germans, on the other hand, are the eternal adversaries, the hated Boches, and confronted with these, there is no softening pity in the brilliant eyes of the good mountaineers. What magnificent stories already shed lustre on the annals of the Southern legions! A Prussian colonel recently published an article in the *Hamburger Fremdenblatt*, in which, with noble

frankness, he did warm homage to "those blue devils who run faster than the chamois, and who are always in the van." M. Mariaud, the Sub-Prefect of Saint-Dié, in an official report of the terrible battle of the Trou de la Mort, writes, fearless of wounding the susceptibilities of the Lorrains: "It was, above all, thanks to the heroic resistance of the Alpine Chasseurs, whom the Bavarians seem to dread unspeakably, that the enemy failed to break through our positions on the Meurthe, which command the valley of La Mortagne, and make a passage for themselves to Épinal. In the fighting round Saint Dié, La Chipotte, and La Croix-Idous, etc., which was terribly severe, positions being taken and retaken a dozen times consecutively, our Alpines made bayonet charges with incredible daring." The eulogy is superb. But perhaps what pleases the Northerners even more than the courage of these soldiers, so different in appearance to the worthy, taciturn Lorrains, is their gaiety, their brilliant bearing, their animation and their poetic attitude even at the most serious moments. A reporter of the *Temps* has told how when one of these "blue devils" fell into an ambush recently, he replied to the Prussian officer who called upon him to surrender:

Bayard de France

Ne craint roussin ni grossepanse

De l'Allemagne.*

And as a fact, all of them, accustomed to consider the knight without fear and without reproach as an Alpin of bygone days, do their best to preserve the somewhat theatrical but exquisite manners of the soldier of the past, amidst the grey and silent monotony of contemporary war, which is so scientific and so dull. From General Bataille, who died like a hero, surrounded by his sorrowing officers, to the last *piou-piou* of the second class, there is not a mountaineer, who, when he falls upon the snows of the German frontier, does not leave a stain of blood redder than that of other soldiers. Under the dark pines the echo of their words has an almost Gascon accent, so different from that of Lorraine that sometimes it seems almost foreign.

“I don’t say that they are braver than my compatriots,” writes a lady of Épinal, “for there is no race that is superior to our own in bravery, but neither are they less brave, and they are brave in a manner I can’t explain.”

This manner, madam, was that of ancient

* A French Bayard fears not any red-headed, pot-bellied German.

legendary France, which modern discipline tends to destroy for scientific reasons, but which lives always and in spite of all among the men of the southern mountains.

In the wood where we were a strain of loquacity and sonorous good-humour animated the entire camp. The trenches were about two kilometres off towards the north, and the men in the wood, resting for a day to return to the struggle to-morrow, bore upon their garments the marks of long, sinister hours in ditches full of mud and snow. The traditional elegance of the handsome lads of Savoy, who, according to a celebrated phrase, keep themselves like young ladies, had disappeared. More than one uniform is tattered, and many caps are shapeless. But all this does not kill joy, nor gaiety, nor poetry in the hearts of the mountaineers. However the rain may fall or the bullets hail, the southern plume waves always proud and spotless. The "we must die" which a mysterious voice is always murmuring day and night in the most intrepid hearts, changes on the lips of the Blue Chasseurs to a gay ritornelle. The only thing about which they show concern in their lofty Cyranesque pride is to die better than their comrades.

From the huts of pine-branches in which the

soldiers were lodged in parties a hum of voices came, high and clear in tone, and the phrases we distinguished were always fraternal and enthusiastic. Not far off, an Italian mountain song was to be heard, played on an accordion. From the depths of a kind of Esquimaux-hut rang out this ingenuous ditty :

Francs chasseurs, hardis compagnons,
Voici venir le jour de gloire,
Entendez l'appel du clairon
Qui vous présage la victoire.
Volez, intrépides soldats,
La France est là qui vous regarde.
Quand sonne l'heure du combat
Votre place est à l'avant garde.
Francs chasseurs, hardis compagnons
Voici venu le jour de gloire.

This Southern bivouac, among the snows of the Vosges, was the first amongst those we had seen during our expedition, which seemed to correspond at all to the pictures we have all imagined after reading the war-chronicles of the past.

One of the officers who accompanied us in our walks through the camp, told us some anecdotes worthy to be preserved in history. On December 24, at the Tête de Faux, a sergeant named F—fell wounded into the wire entanglement between the French and the Germans. His men, who

could not advance to pick him up, because of the fire from the machine-guns, checked their attack for fear of wounding him. Noticing this, the sergeant called out : " Fire ! " " We shall kill you," replied his comrades. " Never mind, fire, fire ! " The soldiers obeyed. The action was very fierce and the noise of the guns deafening ; but the voice of the sergeant, rising above the tumult, continued to cry : " Fire, fire, fire ! " Suddenly it ceased. " Are you still there ? " asked the others. There was no answer. The next day, when it was possible to bring in his body, eighteen wounds were found upon it. More recently, in one of the later fights, the officer in command of an attack on the trenches noticed that one of his Chasseurs was not lying on the ground, in spite of the order that had been given several times. He continued to fire kneeling, all the upper part of his body exposed. " Why don't you lie down as I tell you ? " asked the officer at last, angrily. " Because I have a bottle of wine in my pocket and it has no cork," he answered quite seriously. Only the day before, near this encampment, a corporal had distinguished himself by a deed of valour quite in the style of a gasconade of the " Three Musketeers," over which the Alpins were still chuckling. Corporal

L—, the son of a Pyrenean painter, was alone in a little pine-wood when he saw four Uhlans advancing towards him. His first thought was to defend himself and to sell his life dearly like a valiant soldier. But presently a diabolical idea came into his head. “I will take them prisoners,” he said. And addressing an imaginary patrol in the wood, he called out : “Charge with bayonets, comrades, we must kill these Boches who have dared to intrude upon us !” The Germans, imagining there was a considerable force among the trees, threw down their arms and held up their hands. Then the corporal called out : “All right, captain, I will bring them in alone.” Placing himself beside the Uhlans, he marched them off in parade step to the nearest bivouac.

The officer who told me the story added :

“The only thing that depresses us here is the climate. I don’t mean the cold or the snow, but the want of sunshine. In our Alps it is always light, even in the severest months of the year. But look at this.”

The sky, indeed, was grey, a leaden grey that fills one with gloom and anguish. The wind passes over the black pine-tops, not singing as in the South, but groaning. On the sinuous roads which the mules tread unceasingly, a mixture of

mud and snow forms innumerable channels of slime. And even in the narrow valleys where the snow is immaculate, it is pale ; it has no brilliance, none of the golden and iridescent reflections to be seen on the summits of the Alps and the Pyrenees.

In a plain running northwards, the crosses, already blackened by the rain, stand out, extending their wide arms with a gesture of frank resignation. The pious hands of those who still survive, awaiting death fearlessly, have traced the names of those who sleep below on the wood. Some day, families from other French mountains will come and take away the remains of their loved ones, to lay them in some southern burying-ground. Then those of the next generation will read, not a brief line, but a record of heroism carved on the stone, which will have been a consolation to those who weep.

“ Ah ! ” said an old Savoyard major, showing us the graveyard, “ you cannot imagine the courage with which our women accept the trial of orphanhood or widowhood when they are assured of a heritage of glory. A short time ago a mother wrote to her son, a prisoner at Strasbourg : ‘ I suppose that you were taken prisoner because you were wounded and could not defend

yourself ; get back as soon as you can, that I may nurse you ; but if you were not wounded and you surrendered, never come back, for the town would be ashamed of you.' To be left poor and destitute does not terrify our people ; but they cannot brook the loss of honour. That is a characteristic of our race."

Another characteristic of the rugged Alps is solidarity. Just now all the Alpines are brethren. Two women were praying recently in this field of graves before two adjoining crosses. One was a rich lady from Grenoble whose husband, a captain, fell in September. The other was a poor girl from Gap. Wiping their eyes, the two women rose at the same time, and found themselves face to face.

"I have come to my husband's grave," said the lady. "And you, too, I suppose ? . . ."

The other answered somewhat abashed :

"No . . . he was my lover."

"It's the same thing."

Then taking some of the flowers she had brought for her husband's grave, she laid them on the cross beside it, and approaching the weeping girl, she kissed her, saying :

"We are both widows in the sight of our Lord."

THE GERMANS AT LUNÉVILLE

February 23.

WHEN we read the old chronicles of Lorraine, we form a most enchanting idea of Lunéville. From Nancy and Toul and Bar-le-Duc, from all the great aristocratic centres of the Duchy, those who wished to enjoy life made their way to the banks of the smiling Vezouse. The famous groves of Leopold's Château served Watteau's pupils as a model when they painted the gallant fêtes of the East. At the Court, under ceilings gay with Cupids and Venuses, little Marquises formed a swarm of love-bees round Madame de Ligneville and Madame de Boufflers. Even in Paris, courtly philosophers, following the example of Voltaire, and voluptuous abbés, obeying the orders of La Galaizière, eagerly accepted the invitations of the Princesse de Beauvau-Craon or Madame Châtelet. "Ever since the time of Leopold," says Beaumont, "Lunéville has been a Versailles without stiffness, though not without a protocol. The Duke is a true scion of his race, and likes to receive his humblest subjects ; he amuses himself by inviting prominent citizens to his sumptuous

palace, and he makes his plebeian guests accompany him in his carriages." Life was really much gayer at Lunéville than at Versailles. The Duke danced; the courtiers took parts in comedies first with Adrienne Lecouvreur, and then with the divine Clairon. They declaimed verses by Corneille, they acted in the plays of Molière, they listened to Lully's music. Gold rolled about on the green table-cloths. Brilliant processions passed along the streets. The people were amused by the intrigues of the aristocracy. When Voltaire found his mistress in the arms of a young officer the citizens laughed at the story throughout the spring. The love-affairs of fair ladies became a public spectacle. The funeral of the beautiful Émilie was as sumptuous as that of a princess, and the people wept over her charms and her sins more than they would have wept over the virtues of a saint.

This life and joy and exquisite frivolity disappeared with the sovereigns of Lorraine.

But so great is the glamour of ancient traditions, that my disappointment when I found myself in an industrial, grey, middle-class Lunéville filled me with melancholy. Where were the groves of yester-year? Where the houses of patrician dynasties? Where the gallant

promenades ? The ungrateful city has not even preserved the memory of former splendours in the names of her streets. She flaunts her Rue Thiers, her Rue Bareaudon, her Rue Gambetta, her Rue Carnot. The shops have vulgar wares vulgarly displayed, the modern houses have dark façades, the smoke of factory chimneys obscures the sky. If you think of visiting the church of Jeanne d'Arc, the guide informs you that it was built two years ago. Do you hope to find some fugitive trace of Mlle Clairon at the theatre ? The theatre dates from 1911. The castle has long since been converted into a barrack.

In fact all Lunéville is a barrack in peace time. The 5000 men of its garrison constitute its actual animation, and even its sole gaiety, it may be said. The other 20,000 souls that inhabit it are, the majority, workmen belonging to the different factories, and the minority, rich citizens who lead quiet, retired, and silent lives. At the present time, in spite of the tragedy, there is nothing suggestive of fever, anguish, or emotion, and this though no place bears the scars of its recent days of trial more evidently. The whole of the industrial quarter through which we entered has become a mere field of ruins. A great many of its families are in mourning for the victims of the

German fury. Its town-hall has been burnt, its prefecture destroyed. For twenty days the enemy was the absolute master of the city. And thinking of this, I recalled the angry faces and exasperated gestures of the inhabitants of the villages near Paris through which the invaders merely passed one night, pillaging the shops, and I compared them with the serenity of these dwellers on the frontier.

The Mayor, M. Keller, received us in his magnificent rooms, which look as if they had been adorned for a festival.

“A glass of champagne?” he suggested.

Then, accompanied by his wife and several ladies in nurse’s costumes, he showed us his house, a veritable historic palace in which the Treaty of Lunéville was signed in 1801. The wide staircase still retains the bronze candelabra which lighted the procession of ambassadors. The tapestries in the galleries perpetuate the warriors of the past. Each piece of furniture is a relic of the great centuries.

The conversation became animated under the influence of smiles and evocations.

“This region without sun or gaiety must seem very dismal to you, who come from Spain,” exclaimed Mme Keller.

I tried to turn a compliment to the delicate landscapes of the Vosges, but she added :

“ I am from the Pyrenees, and I have never become accustomed to this climate.”

M. Keller, on the other hand, is the typical man of the east of France, a fanatical worshipper of its soil, its climate, and its race.

“ I would willingly have given my life,” he said, “ to save my fellow-citizens from the atrocities committed by the Germans.”

His face is serious, and it is evident that he means what he says. His conduct during the occupation showed indeed that, indifferent to his personal safety, he thought only of protecting his community. When the Prussian troops entered the town on August 21, the worthy Mayor came forward to receive the Staff, and declared himself responsible for all the acts of the population. A general replied :

“ The inhabitants have nothing to fear if they refrain from hostile acts towards us. But if they attack a single one of my soldiers, you will be the first person I shall shoot.”

“ Your words don't frighten me,” said the representative of the municipality.

During the first few days the Prussians showed respect for the laws of war, and confined them-

selves to requisitioning all they wanted in the way of provisions. The superior officers, who were lodged in M. Keller's house, admitted that they had no complaints to make, and said that those who talked of military abuses committed in other towns were not to be believed. According to them the German troops are not a horde of barbarians, but a formidable legion, highly disciplined and cultured.

"I had begun to believe it," said the Mayor, "and I was rejoicing over the relative calm of Lunéville, when on the 25th, on going into the street, I found myself in the presence of a group of soldiers who were firing into the windows of a house. An officer was in command. I approached him, and giving him my name, I told him that his chiefs, who were living in my house, had promised me that no violence should be offered. The officer replied that his men had been fired on from the windows of that house, adding: 'And not only here, but in other streets as well.' I then proposed that we should go round the town and find out if the inhabitants had really risen against the German troops. We had only gone a few yards when we came upon the corpse of a peaceable citizen whom I knew very well. 'This man,' said the officer, 'was

killed by the bullets fired from this house.' We were close to the synagogue, and the house he pointed out was that of the Rabbi, a perfect saint, incapable of any angry impulse. 'Let us go in, if you like,' I proposed. 'It is not worth while,' he replied, 'for we have shot all the people who were living there.' I thought at once of the Rabbi's daughter, a charming young girl of fifteen, and I said to the officer: 'I suppose the fair-haired young lady who was with the master of the house is safe?' He replied with the utmost sang-froid: 'We shot her.' I cannot express to you what I felt at this moment. Those who could have killed this innocent child seemed to me capable of any crime. 'Poor city!' I murmured, 'thine executioners will not be turned back on the road they have taken!' The German laughed and ordered his soldiers to make me walk quickly. The flames began to crimson the sky in the distance. The cries and songs of the barbarians came to my ears. 'What is happening?' I asked. The officer laughed again. 'Take me to the Kommandatur where the General is expecting me,' I said at last in a voice full of anguish. When they heard me speak of their commander, those who were around me disappeared, leaving me alone, and I was able to

get to the town-hall, which I found on fire. The terrified people came running to me to tell me of the atrocities that were being perpetrated. Over twenty civilians had been murdered. The Jewish synagogue had just been set on fire, and also the Worms factory."

Mme Keller interrupted her husband, saying :

"And at the same moment the generals who were living here were talking to me with the utmost calm of German culture, and swearing that the Emperor desired to establish a permanent peace with France."

The Mayor smiled bitterly and continued :

"At every street corner that night, some victim lay dead among the ruins of his home. The Germans did not wreak their vengeance on men alone. There were aged persons and children among the killed. In the house of our friends the Dujons I found three dead women and a wounded boy. 'They rushed in like wild beasts,' he told me, 'and attacked us before we had time to hide.' As a fact, it was useless to hide or fly. The soldiers searched attics and cellars, killing all they found, regardless of age or sex. The hapless Mme Kahn, an octogenarian invalid, was run through with a bayonet on her bed. I felt that I was going mad, and I only

longed to die avenging my fellow-citizens. But what could I do ? The horde, drunk with blood, filled the streets, singing. On my way to my house, where I intended to seek out a general and throw his infamy in his teeth, I was arrested by a patrol who took me to a café, where I found several other prominent citizens detained as hostages. ‘We are going to shoot the lot of you,’ cried an officer when he heard my name. From that day I was kept closely confined.”

“And the generals ? ” asked some one. “Did they remain in this house ? ”

“Yes,” replied Mme Keller, “here they stayed as quietly as if nothing had happened. When I expressed my anxiety at the absence of my husband, they told me he was at the Kommandatur, where he was quite comfortable. ‘Let me go and see him there,’ I implored them. ‘Impossible, quite impossible,’ they murmured. ‘Weiss is taking charge of him.’ And do you know who this Weiss was ? A German tradesman who had had a shop at Lunéville ; he disappeared on the eve of the war, and returned in an officer’s uniform with the invading troops. As he knew the town very well, he pointed out the rich houses, and had the safes taken by soldiers to the railway station, whence they were sent off to

Strasbourg. We never knew the exact rank of the rascal, but it is quite certain that all the superior officers paid great deference to him and allowed him to do as he liked. I went to him to ask to see my husband, and he would not allow it. I cannot describe the misery I was in during those first days. Every minute I imagined the incendiaries had come to set fire to our house.

The Mayor stroked his wife's hand, murmuring :
" You must not excite yourself."

Then he offered us another glass of champagne, and glass in hand, and a smile on his lips, always quiet and affable, the Mayor of Lunéville took us to his study and made us read a yellow placard which was stuck on a mirror by four wafers.

" It is the notice the Germans published on September 3, to excuse their crimes and terrorize the population," he said.

It ran as follows :

NOTICE TO THE POPULATION

On the 25th August, 1914, the inhabitants of Lunéville made an ambushed attack against German troops and trains. On the same day the inhabitants fired on certain quarters used by the Medical Staff, over which the Red Cross was flying. Moreover, the German wounded have been fired on, as well as the Military Hospital, which contained a German ambulance.

On account of these hostile acts, a fine of 650,000 francs is imposed upon the commune of Lunéville.

The Mayor is ordered to hand over this sum to the representative of the German military authorities, in gold, by 9 o'clock on the morning of the 6th September, 1914. No protests will be entertained and no delay will be allowed. If the commune does not punctually carry out the order to pay this sum of 650,000 francs, all movable property will be seized.

In case of non-payment, house-to-house searches will take place and the persons of all the inhabitants also will be searched. Every one will be shot who deliberately conceals money, or who endeavours to hide goods from seizure by the military authorities, or who attempts to leave the town.

The Mayor and the hostages taken by the military authorities will be held responsible for strict compliance with these orders.

The Mayor is ordered to notify these instructions to the Commune without delay.

"Amen!" cried M. Keller after emptying his glass of champagne.

His wife, who is a native, not of Lorraine, but of the south, and who cannot smile with the irony of the northerners in serious circumstances, quivers with excitement as she tells us what the town endured and what she herself suffered during those tragic days.

"My husband was under arrest," she said, "and those people expected him to collect 650,000 francs in gold. I spoke to one of the generals about it, and do you know what terms I got? That, out of the total sum, 50,000 francs might be paid in *silver*! The wretches!"

"Be calm, be calm," murmured the Mayor, taking us back to the reception-room.

Then he added with great philosophy :

"The important thing was that they went off never to return, and this we owed to our troops. . . . As to the damage they did, we will repair it."

One of the ladies dressed as a nurse, who had not said a word up to this point, now intervened :

"There are some things that are irreparable," she said.

And then, controlling her emotion by a great effort, she told us in a very harmonious voice the horrible story of a friend of hers, one Mme W. This unhappy woman, who had ten soldiers billeted upon her, and did all she could for them, walked home one evening with a relative of hers who lived in a rather lonely quarter. On her return, when she was in the centre of the town, she saw with terror that a group of officers were firing at a poor unarmed man. Flames were lighting up the distant horizon. She ran to the entrance of her own street, and found it full of soldiers in great disorder who were firing into the windows. When they saw her, the Prussians thrust her back with the butt-ends of their bayonets. A lieutenant said to her : "Anyone

who attempts to pass will be killed." But she had left her old invalid husband and her daughter in the house. Without thinking of the danger or paying any attention to threats, she managed to slip through the crowd, and arrived at her own door, where her martyrdom began. A sentry with fixed bayonet repeated the lieutenant's warning, adding that if she did not go away she would be shot there and then. "My daughter, my poor daughter," she cried. Then an officer, roaring with laughter, showed her that the whole street was on fire. There was a café close by, in which several officers were drinking. The woman approached them, and throwing herself on her knees implored them in God's name to help her to save her family.

One of them asked if her daughter were pretty. Another said: "She's already done for." The mother, not understanding, asked if she had been able to escape. "No," they replied; "no one can escape. They have been trying to kill our men, and they must all die. Your husband tried to come out and we shot him. Your daughter is in the flames." At this moment the owner of the café came up and said: "Yes, it is true. Mlle W. imprudently came to the window and screamed. Some soldiers went in and pushed

her back into the middle of the house. She defended herself as well as she could." The officers began to laugh, and Mme W. fell down in a faint. During the night the poor woman found herself near the Château, not knowing how she had got there, and when she came to herself she could not see a soul in the streets. The town seemed to her like a smoking burial ground after the fire. She could not hear a sound, and in her stupefaction she hardly realized what had happened to her. Staggering like a drunken woman, she began to walk along the streets distractedly, not knowing whence she had come nor whither she was going. The wildest visions passed through her brain and she imagined that her daughter was beside her. Soon, when she arrived at the door of her house, she fell again, uttering a piercing cry. A patrol picked her up and took her to the hospital, where the Sisters of Mercy recognized her.

"She is still there," said the lady. "She has not yet recovered her reason. From time to time she calls her husband and daughter, who are in Heaven; then she will remain for days without giving any sign of intelligence."

Mme Keller, carried away by her southern generosity, exclaimed:

“ Oh ! the wretches, the brutes ! ”

Again her husband soothed her. “ Be calm, be calm.”

When we left the Mayor's house to visit the ruins, these last words of his came back to me at every step like a ritornelle. All Lunéville, in fact, breathes calm. People pass quietly, as if the recent tragedy were a thing of ancient history. In shops where post-cards are sold, women offer views of half-burnt buildings without a trace of emotion. And when we asked the way to the synagogue, the sub-prefecture, the town-hall, or other points of our lugubrious pilgrimage, it was shown with the greatest impassibility, as if the itinerary were a normal and pacific one.

A deserted, melancholy air reigns in the town. M. Keller had been talking to us of the development of business, and gave us some hopeful information on the subject. The manufacture of motor-cars, of railway carriages, of china and chemical salts employs thousands of workmen. The trade is increasing to such an extent that there is a saying to the effect that “ it goes 120 to the hour.” The population becomes more numerous every day. But there are no signs of all this at present. Half asleep in its grey atmosphere, Lunéville seems only to exist in

order to guard Duke Leopold's castle, whose noble arcades stand out at the end of a great courtyard, with a majesty that recalls Versailles.

“In summer,” says our guide, “the park is full of lovers. Even from Nancy the gay world comes here for amusement.”

The word “gay” in connexion with this grave sad, silent city offends me as an irony.

PONT-A-MOUSSON UNDER BOMBARDMENT

March 3.

“**W**E cannot go any farther. Listen.”
A shell had burst about two hundred yards from us, and a cloud of smoke rose over the roofs beyond, shrouding the lofty towers of the principal church. The street in which we were was one of the most important in Pont-à-Mousson, a comparatively wide, modern street with small two-storeyed houses. It would have led us in five minutes to the Place Duroc, which is the centre of the town, and thence we should have had a good view of the old quarters, which the German guns were bombarding as furiously as if they had been fortresses. Right and left we saw only closed doors and windows. A single wine-shop a few yards off was still open, and the owner stood on the narrow pavement, watching the effects of the explosion from a distance.

¶ In reply to our question as to why we might go no farther, our guide explained :

“These are my orders. I am forbidden to go into the central quarters which are under fire.

The staff had trouble enough over the Reims affair. Fancy what all the world would say if foreign journalists were killed in one of these expeditions !”

A very serious Englishman remarked with pride that we were war-correspondents.

“As far as I am concerned,” answered our cicerone, “I see no harm in your going. But my orders. . . .”

The owner of the wine-shop approached obsequiously and pointed out the spot where the shell had just fallen.

“It’s always about there. . . . Place Saint-Antoine. . . . Rue des Jardins. . . . Place Duroc. They want to finish off the churches as they did at Reims.”

It seems so. For six months the historic quarters of Pont-à-Mousson have been subjected to a storm of shell which day by day and hour by hour has battered their aged and inoffensive stones. Beautiful ancient façades, which the artists of the whole world came to admire, have already succumbed. The two local churches are gradually losing their delicate external sculptures, and presently they will be bare ruins blackened by flame.

And it is not only ancient landmarks that pro-

voke the stupid rage of the enemy, but anything new and imposing, even if it is not beautiful. Like its great neighbour, Nancy, this place, some nine or ten kilometres from the frontier, has developed in a surprising manner during the last few years. From the street where we had halted we could see in the distance, on the banks of the Moselle, a number of factory chimneys. Their products are famous not only in France but throughout Europe. The wealth, activity, and enterprise of Pont-à-Mousson are proverbial in Eastern France.

“Another bomb!” cried the wine-seller, pointing out a flame which had just appeared on a height towards the north.

At that moment a formidable explosion shook the air and made the panes in the window on our right rattle.

“You will hear others,” he added.

Taking into consideration the industrial importance of Pont-à-Mousson, seeing its chimneys mutilated by shells, and hearing with what feverish activity the Lorrain capitalists multiplied their lofty furnaces, their foundries, their cardboard factories, their lacquer factories, their printing presses, which turned out popular prints by the million, one cannot but wonder whether

the town had lost all recollection of bygone wars during its days of peace. From the neighbouring hills the towers of Metz, with Prussian soldiers on guard, were visible at all hours. Rich businessmen could get to the frontier in ten minutes in their motor-cars. And when the German forts were testing their new siege-guns, their menacing roar was heard more plainly on the Place Duroc than the thunder of the batteries of Toul. "The very day that war is declared," said the German officers to M. Ardouin-Dumazet, "our shells will wake up the Pont-à-Mousson dragoons in a very unpleasant manner." The dragoons laughed, as was only natural. "We will see which of the two will be wakened first!" they exclaimed, with the fine insouciance of warriors eager for the fray. But what seems strange is that the manufacturers should have been equally light-hearted. The working-class population of the place had been multiplied by five between 1870 and 1914. Iron masters came from comparatively long distances to establish works here. Coal smoke had gradually wrapped the landscape in a perpetual fertilizing cloud. White villas rose in flowery groups among the vineyards and hop-gardens, forming luxurious villages which seemed untouched by anxiety. And it cannot be said that these people

were lulled to sleep by the pacifist illusions of Parisian politicians. No one in Lorraine believed in perpetual peace. Living at very close quarters with their enemies, they knew that the latter were strenuously preparing for a sudden attack. But like people who live on mountain slopes, they had acquired a methodical spirit of energy which made them disregard the avalanche always hanging over their heads. "We shall see what will happen," they murmured, when anyone pointed out the dangers that threatened their enterprises. They have been seeing now for the last six months.

"During the last days of July," said the wine-seller, "when the Paris papers were still trying to deceive themselves with illusory diplomatic negotiations, we knew quite well that war had been declared. Every morning when we got up, we asked ourselves if invasion would be an accomplished fact before night. On the 29th, before peace had been officially broken, German patrols crossed the frontier and killed a sentry named Pouget. Orders from Paris were very precise. No one was to stir a finger, negotiations were still going on. On the 30th, Lieutenant Honoré, of a Chasseur regiment, was shot down. Hereupon the garrison troops took the Prussians who had invaded us prisoners, in spite of orders.

At last, on the 31st, we received the news of the general mobilization and we all rejoiced. It's not that we are so very enthusiastic for war, especially we who are in the first line. But things could not go on as they had been doing, and as we were attacked, we had at least to defend ourselves. When once war was declared, the famous patrols ceased to appear. The Boches, who were well informed of all that was happening, knew that our soldiers would not allow themselves to be killed like poor Pouget. For over a week there was complete silence on the frontier. At last, on August 11, the bombardment began."

The man pointed to the quarters which have suffered most.

"Now," he cried, smiling, "we are at the sixtieth day of the bombardment, and for the last three days they have seemed determined that we shall get no sleep. But we are accustomed to the noise now, and we know which are the dangerous quarters. Only spent shells get as far as this. It is in the centre of the town that the hail of these things is thickest."

As at Reims and Arras, indeed, the Germans have expended their utmost fury, God and the Catholics alone know why, against the large churches and religious establishments. Ever

since August, the lofty towers of Saint-Laurent and Saint-Martin have served as targets to the enemy. One Sunday, at the hour of High Mass, when the nave of the principal parish church was full of women praying for their poor absent sons, the shells began to rain upon it. The splendid old stained glass was shattered into thousands of pieces, and the stone saints of the porch fell shattered. In the midst of the natural excitement caused by this incident, the priest went on so calmly with the service that no one moved. When the unhappy parishioners came out from mass, they hardly knew where they were ; the venerable houses of the Saint-Laurent quarter, the old sixteenth-century houses which were the pride of the town, had been destroyed. On All Saints' Day the cemetery became the mark of the Kaiser's gunners. The poor, of course, went on that day to visit the graves of their dead, so it was arranged that they should have a concert of bombs for the occasion. From noon, shells began to tear up the graves, scatter the bones of the dead, and exhume the coffins. Many persons who had gone to spend an hour in the cemetery remained there for ever.

" Oh ! the cowards ! " cried our wine-seller, shaking his clenched fist at the centre of the town, where another shell had just exploded.

Then, controlling himself, and as if in reply to some unexpressed thought, he added :

“ Yes, cowards ! According to the papers, the Germans have been very brave in some places, but that can’t be said of those here. You know we have been at war for six months, and they are still where they were the first day. And they used to say that Pont-à-Mousson would be just an easy walk for their troops. A fine walk they had when they wanted to establish themselves here ! I remember that morning of September 5 when the bells, sounding the tocsin, announced the approach of the enemy. It was the moment when Paris seemed lost, when our troops were retiring in the valley of the Seine, and a catastrophe as great as that of 1870 seemed to threaten us. Do you see what the town is like now ? It was just the same then ; sad, of course, with fewer people than usual, and no shops or cafés open, but it could not be said that it was dead, still less that it was terror-stricken. Living close to the frontier accustoms one to danger, and constant intercourse with the Germans shows that there is nothing very terrible about them if you look them full in the face and talk to them in a loud voice. Accordingly, as soon as the German troops began to advance, our garrison decided to

blow up the bridge. It was simply a device to gain time, for, with the troops at our disposal, it would have been impossible to hold back the immense columns that were attacking us. After six or seven hours of fighting, the devils were able to get in through the Saint-Martin quarter. They came on singing, holding each other by the hand in dense masses, while our men retired to concentrate outside by Sainte-Geneviève. In a minute they occupied the houses, installed themselves in the hotels, and emptied the cellars as if everything belonged to them. The officers knew the town very well, and presented themselves quite calmly in family circles, saying there was nothing to fear and that they would not commit any excesses. I have not read the report of the atrocities committed in Lorraine ; but I don't think it mentions Pont-à-Mousson. Here, as a matter of fact, the soldiers paid for what they had, and did not ill-treat the people. It seems that the Governor of Metz had ordered them to respect the town, because the Emperor had already annexed it. If they had remained quiet, perhaps we should not have driven them out, as our batteries would not bombard us. But they took it into their heads to pursue the French troops, and on the 6th they marched out in very

martial trim, singing lustily. I was at my door, and when they saw me they saluted me, and made signs to assure me that they would soon return and empty my bottles. And they *did* come back ; indeed, when our troops routed them in the open, they came back running, without their helmets, many of them without their rifles, as white as a sheet. The battle had cost them 5000 dead and about 10,000 wounded. All night long the ambulance wagons were passing, and we heard the groans of the wounded. They did not stop for a moment in the town. They evacuated the centre in great disorder and went off to the outlying districts. What joy for us ! It was our turn to drink and sing. I would not let anyone pay their reckoning that night. But on the 9th they came back to the Place Duroc with reinforcements and held a concert with their regimental bands. The worst of it was that they seemed less good-humoured than at first. My wine-shop was full of engineer-cyclists, carrying petrol bombs slung to their belts, ready to fire the town at the first alarm. As I speak German as well as they do, I questioned them, after giving them one or two glasses, and I found the general had given orders that they were not to leave the town as long as one German soldier

capable of defending it remained alive. 'We are here for good, comrade,' they said, drinking off glassfuls of brandy. I gave them all they wanted in order to make them talk. One of them called me 'compatriot.' 'I am a Frenchman, I replied.' 'No,' he cried, 'German; you German, I German; all the French, Germans, all brothers. Only the English *kaput*; we must cut their heads off, because they forced this war upon us.' Presently they told me quite seriously that their commandant had just received a telegram from the Crown Prince in Paris, announcing that Poincaré had given up his sword and placed himself under the Emperor's orders to fight against England. '*Kaput*, the English!' he cried, '*kaput*, now we are all against them.' On the following day the outposts notified the advance of our troops from Jezainville, and the Germans, who had sworn not to retire, began to fly without thinking of defending themselves, without giving themselves time even to throw their incendiary bombs. All through the night of the 10th, there was an uninterrupted, disorderly, frantic retreat. The horses trampled those who stayed behind; the superior officers shouted, but could not get anyone to listen; the soldiers were muttering. On the morning of the 11th there was not a single Boche

left in the town, and since then we have not seen them again."

The wine-seller seemed as proud of what he has been telling as if he himself had driven out the enemy. Suddenly, hearing another shell, his expression changed.

"Ah! the pigs," he cried.

His eyes searched in space for the spot from which the shells were coming. In the mist, the neighbouring hills looked like vague grey clouds floating in the distance.

"This is how they have been bombarding us," he concluded, "ever since they left. We live under a hail of fire that dies down for a few days only to begin again more furiously than ever. Nothing stops them. The white flag of the Red Cross Society? Bah! As soon as they see it, pom, we get a shell. There were hospitals in the schools and factories which were destroyed. The Place Duroc is full of holes. But it doesn't matter. They can't frighten us. Three months ago, when the bombardment blew up the hospitals, you should have seen Major S— walking about the streets, smoking a cigarette, joking with the children, and comforting the wounded. I can't understand why he wasn't killed a hundred times over. They are not so furious now. Listen."

Another shell had just burst, still in the vicinity of the churches, and a column of smoke rose into space, still about two hundred yards from the place where we were. The cannonade never changed in direction. The bombs fell methodically every ten minutes. A few persons passed, however, along the streets that ascend, and went towards the centre, as if nothing particular were happening. The street boys ran off to where there was something new to see, some house, yesterday intact and now destroyed, some fragment of shell, still hot, to pick up.

We alone stood motionless, 'unable to take a step in advance, unable to see the shattered windows of Saint-Laurent or Saint-Martin, unable to talk to those who live in perpetual danger. We could fancy that there was a smile of mournful irony on the lips of the three or four women who stood near us. Even the most prudent among us felt ashamed of fleeing thus from a peril that old men do not fear.

A few yards farther, to the Place Duroc, we murmured, would not be such a great matter.

But our guide shook his head with his usual inflexible air.

“Don't you think that I, too, should like to see the ruined houses!” he exclaimed at last,

irritated by our persistence. "I am just as curious as anyone else, and my feet fairly tingle at being stuck here. But I have had my orders. Come, let us go, to avoid useless temptation."

Silent and melancholy we returned to our motor-cars, having seen nothing but a few almost deserted streets, and having heard nothing but the picturesque story told by our wine-seller ; we had not even touched a single fragment of spent shell. The roar of the guns died away gradually as we approached Loisy, and at last we could distinguish nothing in the grey air, when we turned to bid farewell to the brave martyred city, but the two dark towers of the principal church, sending up to Heaven prayers that Heaven refuses to hear.

THE FRENCH SOLDIER

March 10.

UNTIL lately, the French soldier had the reputation of being more admirable in attack than in defence. "If you can manage to win the first battle from them," said Frederick the Great, speaking of the troops of Louis XV, "you will win all the rest." And this idea had become so general in the world that the majority of military critics were convinced that the issue of the present war would depend upon the result of the great encounter at Charleroi. "If the Germans obtain a victory on the frontier," wrote M. Akkins in August, "nothing will stop them in their march upon Paris." They won this victory, and yet when after the retreat the Generalissimo cried "Halt!" on the banks of the Marne, his troops, far from seeming enfeebled or enervated, showed themselves more robust than ever. For the first time in history France had learnt to organize victory in the course of a disaster.

Recognizing the character of the modern campaign, the little French trooper, but yesterday known only for his ardour in attack, has now proved himself quite as capable as his foe of

tenacity, patience, silence, and passive resignation. For months, indeed, he has been fighting with more calm than fury, gaining ground foot by foot, returning ten and twenty times over to the assault of the same trenches, standing immovable under shell-fire, giving, in short, an example of coolness that the whole world has admired, not without a certain surprise. "I must confess," writes the Japanese Banno, "that I did not believe the French capable of that methodical rage which is more characteristic of the northern races, but the drama of the struggle as it develops shows to what an extent an energetic and intelligent nation can adapt itself to all systems." And this same Banno, recalling the heroic deeds he witnessed in Flanders, declares that in his new martial avatar, the Frenchman has lost nothing of his chivalrous heroism. "In Manchuria," he writes, "we had a General, Matsunaga, who in extreme peril preferred to die and to sacrifice all his troops in a desperate enterprise rather than surrender. At Port Arthur, General Nakamura caused all his soldiers to be dressed in white—the colour of death and mourning among us—and led them to the assault of a fort, where every one of them perished. I thought such feats of arms as these would never be witnessed

in countries so highly civilized as those of Europe. I was convinced of the contrary by the magnificent General M—, who, seeing all his brigade endangered, made an incredible charge at the head of his cavalry; by Admiral R—, who, at the defence of Dixmude, after all his officers had fallen by his side, continued to command the remnant of his sailors single-handed; by General G—, who, engaging forces four times as numerous as his own, lighted his pipe under a hail of shells, ordered the attack, and won the battle.”

The worst, or the best of it, is that Joffre by no means approves of this prodigal heroism, as the poor Saint-Cyrians know by experience.

Have you heard the story of these young people? Appointed sub-lieutenants at the outbreak of the war, the Saint-Cyrians agreed that the first time they went into action they would wear their white gloves and their tricoloured plumes. In vain did their commanding officer point out that the latest regulations enjoined the concealment of all external marks that could distinguish the officer from his soldiers. With an idea of war proper rather to the days of Bayard than to our own times, these young paladins kept their mutual promise and fell, the victims of their

word. Those who survived were not congratulated, but punished.

“No romanticism!” cries the Generalissimo, when such deeds are discussed.

But what could destroy in the soul of the race the ancient leaven of gay and clamorous heroism, full of charming puerilities and sublime generousities, which constitutes what was called in former days the *furia francese*? In the trenches, silent and vigilant, the trooper makes a sacrifice, and does so with a certain melancholy. To cheer him up, it is only necessary to promise him a change in the course of operations. A few weeks ago Joffre caused an order of the day to be read to the troops, couched in terms which gave hope of an immediate general offensive. And it was extraordinary to see the enthusiasm, the joy, the ardour with which the whole army greeted the promise of new tactics. Deceived by the fiery words of their great chief, they all thought the trenches were to be abandoned for ever, that they were to advance to the charge in the open country, gallop proudly, lance in rest, rush to the assault with fixed bayonets. In the camps, ingenuous songs were at once poured forth, celebrating as a resurrection the end of life underground, of the conflict between crouching beasts,

of troglodyte stratagems. Light, air, space, gaiety, movement, long live France, hurrah for plumes, hurrah for the white gloves of Saint-Cyr ! It became necessary to explain to the men that the attack contemplated by the General did not imply, at any rate for the present, any change of method, but increased effort in the existing system.

Oh ! that existing system. *Le Temps* has just published a letter from a soldier, which sums up all the resigned antipathy which the French feel for mole-warfare. "The Germans have transformed the profession of arms into a mason's job ; as soon as we take a position, before we think of rifles, we have to lay hold of shovels, pickaxes, and spades to dig new holes for ourselves. The life we lead in the trenches is not so miserable as it seems at first, and if it were not for the rain it would be almost bearable. We are not cold, thanks to the warm garments that are sent to us in such abundance on every side. Our rations are good and plentiful : meat, vegetables, sardines, chocolate ; in short, we have nothing to complain of under this head. But if we are well enough from the material point of view, the unanimous cry is nevertheless : quick, quick, take us out of this to fight in the open country and charge with

the bayonet, under the shelter of our wonderful gunnery. This war of the buried alive is repugnant to our temperament, and if we wage it, and wage it as well as our enemies, it is only because we are convinced that it is the only way for the moment. For indeed it requires more heroism to hide as one fires, to come out only to crawl on the ground, to attack on all fours, and to cut wire entanglements in the middle of the night, than to march joyously under shell-fire in broad daylight to the blare of the trumpets sounding the charge. The capture of a trench is a methodical and scientific operation; it must be done, and we do it. We advance by the yard, and the general impression is that we are always stationary. We do not move; that is our grievance in trench-life."

Here in the bivouac, among the straw huts of what are nicknamed the negro villages, not only do the soldiers move, but they excite each other, vibrating to the breath of the noblest hopes, the most heroic illusions. Like children they amuse themselves, laughing, singing, playing tricks on each other, describe extraordinary adventures, and in a word revive, after two thousand five hundred years, the gaiety of the Greek camp as Xenophon paints it for us, with its somewhat

coarse joy which perpetual danger ennobles, with its profusion of improvised trophies, with its clandestine libations and its humble banquets, with its songs which speak continually of the barbarians, and of an Emperor who might be either Artaxerxes or William II.

"They are really amazing, these troops consisting of men of all ages, who seem to be about twenty years old," said one of my colleagues.

"It is the antithesis that is amazing," I observed.

And indeed it is extraordinary that this army, only seven months old, should already have had time, not only to have welded all the nation into a compact mass of admirable fighters, but further, to create veterans like Bonaparte's *grumblers*, who seemed to be always complaining of their lot, and who were always the first to go out and meet danger. The Paris newspapers have had a good deal to say about a certain Jigo, who won the military medal a few days ago. Jigo is a delightful creature. "Dirty," says his biographer, "hairy, and unshaven, his cap perched on his left ear, stinking of brandy and tobacco, he never ceases to deafen his comrades with the thunder of his braggadocio. He is over forty years old, and he enlisted as a volunteer on the very day of the

mobilization. When the commanding officer gives an order, Jigo mutters and frowns. But when the march begins, Jigo is always in the forefront. He is the unfailing volunteer: for dangerous patrols, for difficult missions, for unusual actions. The only thing he asks is to be allowed to go alone. What would be the use of a handful of comrades, when his adventures always consist in being alone against an army. Alone, without haste, he goes through the woods or along the country paths and arrives where he has to go. When he is cold, he kills a hostile sentry to take his overcoat, and when he has reason to believe that there are some bottles of brandy in a German trench, he has no rest until he has induced his officers to attack it with bayonets. 'Bullets,' he says, 'might break the bottles,' and for Jigo there is nothing more sacred in the world than these. His captain adores him, and threatens every day to have him shot, for no one is less amenable to discipline than Jigo. He often disappears during a march. When he is sought he cannot be found; but suddenly he appears on the scene, somewhat bloodstained, always singing, and full of good news which very often saves his regiment." This volunteer veteran, always grumbling and joking,

is no unique specimen. In every company, in every section, there is more than one fellow of his stamp, as ready to turn a couplet and make the colonel laugh, as to sacrifice himself to please the lieutenant. It is they who construct the smartest huts of the camp ; they who, no one knows how, find ducks and fowls to supplement the ration ; they who, in tragic moments when lads are thinking of their mothers or their sweethearts, and turning pale under the hurtling shells, bring out the absurd, incongruous phrase that provokes peals of laughter ; they who, when the general has to be asked to pardon a poor fellow, condemned for some peccadillo, passes over the hierarchy and goes off to the Staff, pipe in mouth.

In the camp we have been visiting to-day, our guide was a sergeant of this curious race of veterans who laugh and grumble at the same time, and who, with their familiar manners and their cordial speech, seem to suppress all social differences in favour of the humble. He called our attention gaily to the architectonic details of the straw huts.

“This is a palace in the Roman style, with columns and friezes,” he said, as we paused before a hut supported by six tree-trunks.

Then he read the names of the various structures, painted with blacking on deal boards:

“The Tavern of Olympia. . . . Weekly Repose. . . . The Sucking Flea. . . . The Marble Monastery. . . . Algeria Villa. . . . Lutetia Villa. . . . Villa of the Sleeping Louse. . . . Châlet of Fraternity. . . . Moulin Rouge.”

The veteran exclaimed with pride:

“We have everything, gentlemen: a canteen, dining-rooms, theatres, balls, and even newspaper offices. Yes, gentlemen, we have two newspapers, one serious and argumentative, written by Corporal Mayal, a parish priest in times of peace, and the other gay and satirical, to which every one may contribute once a month. I am sorry that to-day’s edition is sold out. The padre’s paper appears in six copies, and the other in twenty, which are distributed in the canteens. But the padre writes such a shocking bad hand that we can’t read his articles.”

The soldiers about us laughed gaily, applauding the sergeant’s farrago.

A sudden clatter of saucepans made our guide exclaim:

“The performance is about to begin, gentlemen; the doors are open. Let us make haste.”

Behind the encampment we found a shed

made of branches, in which a clever mountebank had put up his boards and trestles. The marionettes that appeared were not so elegant as those of the Guignol in the Champs Elysées, but the piece they performed was full of interest to us. It turns on nothing less than the tragedy which brings the war to an end. The title was: "The Last Sigh of William II." The main action took place in Germany, in the palace at Potsdam. In the first act, Punch and Guignol agreed to save Europe from the present horrors. "These horrors," said Punch, "are not the things imagined by the chemist with the black-rimmed spectacles, still less those that make Mme Françoise tremble, but the cunning and coolness with which the Boches have shut themselves up in trenches like rabbits, to make the war go on for ever without any risk of getting a taste of our bayonets." Guignol declared for his part, that if it were a question of getting on horseback and dashing out, sword in hand, to fight in the open, he would not mind how long the war lasted. "But a war like this one," they agreed, "must be brought to an end." And arm in arm, the two chums set out for Germany. In the second act, they were at the frontier, and before advancing into the enemy's country, they thought it well

to learn German. "You know," said Polichinelle, "you must say all the consonants together without a single vowel, making a dreadful noise with your mouth, like this: Krdjvrnkmrssdn-ggskk . . . above all, you must not forget the k's; there must be plenty of k's. When the idiom is perfect, costume is unimportant." Guignol kills two sentries he finds on guard at the gates of Aix-la-Chapelle, and takes their great-coats, their helmets and their rifles. "And now," he cries, "to Berlin." In the third and last act, the scene, as a mysterious voice informed us, was laid in the throne-room of the Palace of Potsdam. Two stiff and haughty soldiers were on guard on either side of the throne. "Guignol," murmurs one. "What is it?" answers the other. "Do you know exactly what to do?" "Yes, Punch, yes, don't be afraid. If he comes alone, he won't escape us." The two marionettes looked grave and lugubrious. They tried in vain to stand quietly, their whole bodies were quivering. "Attention!" cried Guignol, suddenly. "Attention!" repeated Punch. Hereupon a proud and sinister figure entered with moustaches turned up to his eyes. Punch and Guignol threw themselves upon him, and stripping off their helmets and overcoats, they appeared in

the uniform of French soldiers. "In the name of the law," they cried, "we arrest you, Emperor William!" The Emperor was about to summon his guard, but Punch stopped his mouth; Guignol took a paper from his pocket, and presenting it to the man with the moustaches, cried: "This is your deed of abdication. Sign, or I will kill you. The German Republic is to be proclaimed to-night, and a European peace will follow immediately. If you won't sign, prepare to die." The Emperor heaved a sigh and signed. At the back of the miniature stage a voice sang the "Marseillaise," with imitations of drums and trumpets: "Ta-ra-ta-ta-ra-ta-ra." Loud applause broke out on every side, accompanied by childish laughter and delicious comments.

"If I had been Guignol," said one, "I would not have been satisfied with making him sign. I would have run him through with my bayonet."

"But you couldn't have killed him, he was unarmed," objected another.

The sergeant who was guiding us through the maze of excited soldiers said in a tone at once bombastic and good-natured:

"Have you heard of the Company of the Dare-devils? It consists of Southerners—well—when

I say 'consists,' that's not quite right, for at present there are only a few survivors out of the two hundred fellows who formed it. I am one of them. I must have some very big sins to expiate in this world, for the bullets and shells make off as soon as they see me. The night when the poor company went into action for the last time, I thought, nevertheless, that I should be left to spend the night on the field. The captain had noticed that not eighty paces from our trenches the Germans had put up a terrible wire entanglement which secured them against attack, and enabled them to shoot us down like rabbits directly we put our noses out of our holes. 'The devil!' said a lieutenant, 'what they have done in one night, we will undo in another.' It was at once agreed that the whole company, armed with nippers, should undertake the glorious task of cutting the wires that very night. At eleven o'clock exactly, when all seemed quiet, the two hundred of us crawled like lizards to the parapets which were about twenty paces from the enemy. 'You must neither speak nor cough nor even breathe audibly,' the captain had told us. After an hour of crawling we arrived. We were all in high feather, thinking that we had not been seen. But we had scarcely begun on the wire when

an enormous searchlight illuminated us up as brilliantly as a flood of sunshine . . . and crack, crack, the machine-guns began to welcome us. 'It is useless to retire,' cried the captain, 'let us cut the wires and die to some purpose.' I must tell you that most of us had no rifles, nothing but our nippers. 'We'll cut them,' they all cried, and the work began under a hail of bullets. My poor chums fell in bunches. A lieutenant from Marseilles began to sing a Provençal air to hearten us : '*Aquelos mountagnos que tan aoutos soun.*' We all took it up. It was a concert. '*Aquelos mountagnos.*' Alas ! a good many never finished the couplet. I never saw so many fall. The Boches called out 'Surrender !' Those who had rifles replied by firing. The Daredevils surrender ! The captain called out : 'Surrender if you like, but I shall finish myself off first.' There was no need. A German bullet did the business for him. 'Get on,' cried the Marseilles lieutenant, a giant whose voice could be heard twenty kilometres off, 'get on with the work, cut.' And he continued his song, '*Aquelos mountagnos . . . que tan aoutos soun.*' But the chorus grew fainter every minute. When all the wires were cut we were ordered to get back to our trenches, crawling and in silence. The enemy's guns followed us, guided by the

cursed flash-light, and many of our poor fellows were left behind on the way. Do you know how many of us got back out of the two hundred who started? Forty; yes, sir, forty out of two hundred."

The sergeant lighted his pipe, pulled at it slowly, and then puffing out the smoke disdainfully, cried :

"But those forty are equal to a thousand."

Then, fixing his eyes on one of us who has a very youthful appearance, Sims, the American correspondent of the New York Press Association, he asked :

"Do you know what is the most dangerous thing in war?"

"No," answered the American.

"Youth, sir. I don't know why, but bullets are like women, they seem to prefer the young ones. Look at me, I am a grizzled old fellow. I am forty. And forty years in Africa count double. But no bullet so much as grazes me. The other thirty-nine survivors of our company are old stagers, too, most of them over thirty. The twenty-year olds are all gone—snatched from us, sir."

And turning to the soldiers around, among whom there were men of all ages, some mature, some very young, he asked :

It was so, wasn't it, *poilus* ? ”*

“ *Poilus* !

From Joffre himself to the latest recruit there is not one who is not a *poilu*. It is good to hear the pride with which they cry, “ We are *poilus* ! ” and the enthusiasm with which, speaking of the famous general, they murmur, “ There's a *poilu* for you ! ” The term *poilu* sums up all the soldier's virtues, his heroism, his self-sacrifice, his good humour and his sufferings. Describing the passage of a battalion returning from the firing-line, ragged, dirty, and unshaven, singing a coarse, expressive, marching song, Dumont-Wilden wrote, “ All classes are represented among these men. There are peasants with horny hands and sun-burnt faces ; there are men who six months ago wore dress-coats and were assiduous ‘ first-nighters ’ ; there are intellectuals, dainty and conceited. Now one and all are confounded in a single mass, the glorious mass of the *Poilus* of France.”

The *Poilus* ! To tell the truth, I don't know the origin of the nickname, or its precise meaning. But I repeat it with pleasure, because to me it has a rough, joyous flavour, a suggestion of epic grandeur and raillery, which recalls the nicknames of Napoleon's volunteers.

* Literally, shaggy, hairy.

Yes, there is no doubt of it, all the magnificent past of the country, its gaiety and its courage, its noble chivalry and its noisy good-nature, have been revived in the camps of Lorraine, where the soldiers spend their lives singing to the roar of the guns. And even if one has no great faith in anecdotes of the past or of the present, it is impossible not to admire such a combination of simplicity and greatness, of modesty and swagger, and, above all, the kindliness, the clarity, and the sublimity of this race which is able to fight without hatred and to die without melancholy.

One of the things that cause most surprise to my colleagues, accustomed to attach great importance to newspaper articles and political speeches, is the entire absence in the battle-field of the Parisian rancour against Germany, or, rather the Germans. With the exception of the Emperor and the Crown Prince, whom every one holds responsible for the war and its atrocities, the French *piou-piou* detests no one in the enemy's ranks. Of course, when there is talk of the burning of villages, he cries, "You'll see what we will do when we get into their Germany." But this is merely momentary. They are easily melted by a case of suffering, or fired by a gallant deed

on the part of the enemy. And among all the soldiers to whom we spoke of the Germans as combatants, there was not one who did not testify: They are admirable !

Listening to the *piou-pious*, I thought of the noble lines, harmonious as verse, in which Maurice Barrès celebrated the heroism of those who fell on the banks of the Yser, in the vain attempt to break through to Calais. “ Oh ! cried the poet, “ how those splendid troops, intoxicated with war-like songs and national ambitions, advance in close formation, shoulder to shoulder, their souls on fire. Shells, machine-guns and projectiles tear breaches in their ranks, and mow them down like standing corn. What matter ! They form anew, return to the attack, and are again laid low. And then others and others again take the place of the fallen, always ready for sacrifice.”

Less poetically, but no less warmly, officers and soldiers in camp tell us the same story. One of the youngest artillery lieutenants, a lad with blue eyes and a girlish mouth, murmured, after describing an engagement in which a regiment of the Prussian Guard tried to seize a position defended by two 75 mm. guns :

“ It was pitiable to see them falling in masses, grave and solemn as if they had been performing

a rite. I prayed for them from the bottom of my heart ! What troops ! ”

One of us, who had heard of the ease with which the Germans allow themselves to be taken prisoners in the neighbourhood of Verdun, asked the French officers :

“ How do you explain their heroism in the mass, and the poor resistance they offer when they are surprised ? ”

“ The reason of this apparent contradiction,” said a captain, “ is to be found in their conception and application of discipline. It seems a paradox, but in a sense discipline is the greatest defect of the German army. In his exaggerated obedience, the soldier, especially the Prussian soldier, loses all sense of individuality. In a scrap between patrols, for instance, if the French officer falls, he is replaced at once by one of his men, and the fight goes on. On the other hand, when the German officer falls, his men, who have been fighting like lions heretofore, are suddenly disconcerted, and don’t know what to do or to think. Each German is an admirable wheel in a perfect machine ; but if the main wheel goes wrong, the whole machine stops. The French have their own personality, their ideas, their vanities, everything, in fact, which constitutes a complete being. This has its

drawbacks, of course. With soldiers like ours, an unpopular war would be impossible. From the humblest *piou-piou* to the most learned staff captain they are all busy judging and criticizing. It is different in Germany ; the troops, though they may not have the slightest idea of the causes of a war, march on in parade step, and never stop as long as they have officers to command them. To sum it all up, the German is the soldier of science, and the Frenchman is the soldier of inspiration. Which is the better man ? No one will ever know ! Of late years, until the outbreak of the war, the whole world was Germanophil in military matters. Before 1870 it was Francophil. After the present war, God alone knows. . . . The victor will always have more prestige than the vanquished."

This is very certain. To-morrow, when of what is now happening, all that remains will be the synthetic notion of victor and vanquished, the sublimest efforts and the most heroic deeds of those who have not triumphed will be forgotten. But what history will never fail to record, whatever happens, is the ardour, the enthusiasm, and the joy with which the whole French people, without distinction of parties, hastened to the battle-field, making the most compact and the

most animated human mass of a nation lately divided by conflicting ideals and hostile prejudices.

The Japanese journalist I have already quoted says, writing of this magnificent military democracy, so different from the German aristocracy: "The other day, near Châlons, in a bivouac, I met a Professor of the Sorbonne, very well known in fashionable French drawing-rooms, who is now a private soldier. He has not lost his refinement of manner, but when I saw him he was humming a song the coarseness of which would have delighted a Parisian cabman. A few months of campaigning had sufficed to evoke in him those soldier-instincts which are latent in the heart of every Frenchman, be he never so gentle and pacific. I have also seen diplomatists, bankers, actors, and priests, all inspired by the same exclusively military spirit, and so changed from their former selves that no one would recognize them at first sight. This union, this fraternal and familiar uniformity exists not only among equals, but also between superiors and inferiors. This is one of the things that strike a stranger most. Subordinates recognize the authority of their officers readily, because to them obedience represents not a social hierarchy, but merely a hierarchy of study and competence.

Thanks to this idea of rank, authority is combined with comradeship, without any infringement of discipline. In Germany it is not and cannot be the same thing. The German officer belongs to a superior caste, which would never consent to fraternize with the private soldiers under any circumstances whatever. In France, a captain does not mind sleeping on straw in the middle of his men, and very often he drinks out of the same bottle with them. A Prussian lieutenant would think himself dishonoured if he had even to travel in the same compartment with his subordinates. This, no doubt, accounts, to some extent, for the sombre gravity of the German army, and the frank and noisy good humour of the French army."

We all agreed with the Japanese journalist as soon as we came in contact with Joffre's soldiers.

They are more than an army, they are a formidable family in arms to defend the common hearth. The Generalissimo inspires veneration, but no fear, and the *piou-pious* gaily call him "Grandpapa." The commander is only the superior by virtue of his functions. Discipline, terrible discipline, the breaker of wills elsewhere, a thing of iron to the Germans, is a thing of velvet here. If the fighting is impeccable and the work

well done, all the rest is of small importance. If the soldiers sing like birds, amuse themselves boisterously, and play tricks on each other like children, so much the better. The better their spirits, the more bravely they will die ; the more lively they are, the greater the gallantry they will show in the field.

A short time ago, the *Figaro* published a letter from a sergeant of artillery which must have filled the serious, respectful, and submissive soul of the Prussian soldiery with indignation. "As there is nothing more boring than to be kept standing beside a silent telephone," says the sergeant, "the sappers have invented an amusement in which I also indulge, when I am on guard in the outposts. When night comes and there are no more communications to be made to the batteries, the telephone lines of the advance posts have a rest—in theory. I say in theory, because then we fellows begin to talk to the other observers, and to the stations in the camp, and we sing all the songs of our respective repertoires to each other. The telephones are transformed into 'theatrophones.' The platoon rolls out admirable Tyrolean songs in the general's cabinet ; in the brigade there is a clown in the style of Footitt ; a storyteller in the aeroplane park

makes us laugh with his piquant anecdotes ; at the colonel's telephone there is a fireman who crows like a cock, barks, brays, and neighs irreproachably. And thus we pass away the unoccupied hours during which nearly all the guns are silent. Now and again a voice is interrupted by a shell, and that voice we shall never hear again. But those who are left do not stop their singing and laughing on that account. Death, in fact, no longer frightens or saddens anyone."

What would the exclusive admirers of Prussian discipline have said, only six months ago, to these ingenuous confessions ? They would probably have descanted on the decadence of the race and on the relaxation of discipline.

Now, every one knows that this and many other things of the same kind are only endearing manifestations of French gaiety, the daughter of Athenian gaiety.

Those who only know Paris with its perpetual fever and its permanent nervous irritation have no idea of the real French gaiety, ingenuous, noisy, spritely, gallant, fresh, loquacious, healthy, and robust. "Gallic laughter," say foreigners. I would rather evoke Athenian laughter, subtle and full of those delicate shades that surprise in the people, and still more in the people

armed and at war. "These men," wrote the old Aristophanes rather peevishly, speaking of the soldiers of his day, "have a tendency to look upon life as a pleasure-party." The same might be said of Joffre's soldiers. The Germans accuse them of being frivolous, superficial, and disrespectful. From their point of view the Germans are right. Each people has the inevitable defects of its qualities. Without this superficial levity how could the France of to-day and of history bear the evils that Fate has made her suffer? She has been able to pass through the most tragic phases of her history laughing and singing. Laughing and singing, she has escaped the prostration into which grave people like the Spaniards and the Turks subside when they are cast down. What would have become of the poor France of 1870 without her laugh? But those who do not see the almost religious depth and gravity beneath this levity, do not know the soul of the country. To march to death singing and jesting is to sanctify frivolity. Where on earth do we find heroes like those of this race, save in the epic story of the Greeks? Other nations have fought—moved by self-interest, love of independence, a holy pride. France alone has fought for the mere love of fighting, for pure delight in danger, for the noble

joy of self-sacrifice. Seek the reason of the most brilliant battles of ancient France, and you will not always be able to find it. But, on the other hand, you will find, even in the hour of disaster, the same chivalrous elegance and the same heroic joy. Examine a collection of portraits of European heroes, English, German, Spanish, and French. All will inspire equal respect. In all you will find the same appearance of strength and energy. "They are of one family," you will think. But when you examine their features more closely, you will soon see that the only smiling faces are those of the French. And this, which seems nothing to those who study war from the technical point of view, is what throughout the ages has given French History its airy and discreet brilliance, only comparable to that of the Athenian legend.

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